A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

A concise survey of how the English novel developed, from its beginnings to the works of Lawrence Durrell and Samuel Beckett.

DIANA NEILL

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OF THE
ENGLISH NOVEL

Excerpts from A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

On the Elizabethans

"We have no novel of equal power and significance to set beside Shakespeare's *Macbath* and *King Lear*".

On early belles-lettrists

"Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Howard, Mrs. Barker, and Mrs. Rowe, followed the lead of Mrs. Behn. . . .Their writings are sentimentel pseudo-historical fiction, generally not much above the level of scandalmongering."

On eighteenth-century novelists

[They] were blind to the subtler implications and the almost limitless possibilities of their medium."

On the Gothic novelists

"By playing on the deep psycho-physical disturbances that occurred when man was confronted by the supernatural . . . they provided a new thrill and at the same time prepared the way for the true Romantics."

On the Victorian novelists

"[They] were masters of the art of telling a story. Their serial methods might lead to lapses and repetition and were not conducive to fine art, but the story always gripped and the reader hurried on to find out the next turn."

On the nineteenth-century awakening

"The importance of the novel as one of the fine arts . . .was at last recognized. . . . At the same time theory-mongers and satirists seized upon the novel as a means of propagating ideas and . . . combined story and realistic characterization with attacks on the foundations of contemporary society."

On the innovators of the 'twenties and 'thirties

"Systematic disorganization of material for more vivid presentation is peculiar to most arts today and may have its origin in collective psychatic disturbances at present unrecognized and unexplored ; but in the novel it has made for a lack of ease in narration."

On the angry young men

"This new generation of post-war novelists was harder, more cynical than its predecessors. Fine writing, symbolism, introversion, poetry, polemics were eschewed . . . . What chiefly characterized them was the attitude of being anti-authority and anti-tradition."

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S.D.N.

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Romance and Realism in Early Fiction

THE ENGLISH NOVEL, like the English language, is a rich and flexible instrument which has developed casually through the centuries, making its own laws, breaking them, borrowing from abroad, now here, now there, absorbing every fresh idea, rarely jettisoning an old one, and branching out afresh at the whim of every master hand which has gone to its shaping. In truth, the story of the novel has no end and no beginning. The generally accepted opinion that the father of the English novel was Samuel Richardson is not without foundation. He was certainly the first to bind psychological interest, dramatic complexity and convincing characterization into a whole and to present them with naturalism. Yet centuries before Richardson men had experimented with story-telling ; delight in adventures, interest in personality and the taste for realism were as strong in pre-Elizabethan times as they were in the eighteenth century.

Before the Norman Conquest in the grey wastes of Saxon Britain, men huddled round great fires and beguiled the long nights with the old heroic sagas of Theodoric, Widsith, Wieland, of Beowulf and Cynewulf. These, however, were all in verse. Beowulf, composed for declamation, has all the modern radio-writer's tricks for catching the ear rather than the eye—repetition, alliteration, and so on. A novel, admittedly, obeys few laws, but it must be a story written to be read in silence, the silent communion of author and reader. It demands no audience ; but by the very law of its being it demands the existence of a large reading public, attuned to its contemporary conventions. Right through the so-called Dark-Ages, no such public existed. The chief factor restricting the earlier development of the novel may well have been the supremacy of the drama and the greater prestige of poetry. Not, in fact, until the drama had declined did prose fiction begin to flourish. There is nothing in English, written in prose, which can be properly called a novel until the sixteenth century, but throughout the preceding centuries a public was coming into existence which would make the novel possible and produce both the demand and the writers to satisfy it.

Such a public had once existed. In the later centuries of Greece, Rome and Byzantium tales of love and adventure were eagerly read. All the forms of fiction that were to be popular in the finished art of France and England—pastoral romance, picaresque adventure, satire, fantasy, even the scientific romance, are to be found in later Greek and Latin literature. Longus, Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, together with Apuleius, Petronius and Lucian, have survived, but the number of old romances may well have been far greater. By strange and circuitous routes stories from these romances found their way to northern Europe brought by traders, by priests in exile, by crusading knights.

The barest plot of innumerab'e stories—not altogether unknown in modern magazines—had filtered through from ancient Greece. This was the story of star-crossed lovers about whose birth and origin there is mystery. The device was a natural one in a country where economic conditions led to exposure of unwanted infants and where casual adoption was quick with potential drama. Imported into English the story blossomed ultimately in a long series of highly artificial plots leading up to incredible recognition scenes based on strawberry marks, bloody arrows and embroidered swaddling clothes—devices which, after delighting generations of readers and theatre-goers, were finally shouted down in the laughter of burlesque. From the same source came the pirate motive (equally remote in time and place from the experience of readers) which was to flourish in English fiction for centuries. Yet this too had been a grim reality at a time when the luxurious cities of a decayed Mediterranean civliziation lay open to the attacks of robber hordes that infested the hitherto secure waters.

So it might be said that the beginnings of the English novel are to be sought amid the detritus of a vanishing civilization, by the sun-washed shores of pirate-infested seas of Greece, in the Rome of Petronius, and in Byzantium where the Grail Legend was born. Over the centuries a vast body of material was built up from which ensuing generations could draw. Thus in the scurrilous broadsides of Elizabethan pamphleteers, in merry tales current among humble folk, were to be found themes, characters and incidents that had their origin in the iridescent artifice of Byzantium and in the racy salacities of Milesian courtesans. Long after the heroic ages were over,

when chivalry and adventure with their cavalcade of necromancers, sibyls and magicians had departed and the oracles that inspired them were silent, they continued to enjoy an insubstantial immortality in works of fiction.

The earliest classical legends that survive the cataclysm of the Dark Ages—the story of Troy, the story of Thebes and the story of Alexander—came to Europe steeped in fantasy through the pseudo-Homeric poems of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis. These mysterious personages were held in fabulous esteem during the Middle Ages thanks to a complete misunderstanding of their origin. Both were believed to be contemporaries of the epic heroes Hector, Achilles and the rest of whom they wrote. Dares was wrongly identified with a Trojan priest of that name mentioned in the *Iliad*, while Dictys, equally wrongly, was thought to be the comrade of Idomeneus, the Cretan leader. As supposed eye-witnesses of the battles they describe they were considered more reliable than Homer, who had lived after these events. Most likely these names were adopted by Greeks writing in the Alexandrine period who used material from existing epics and sagas to compile their vast epitomes of what has been called *The Matter of Rome, the Great*; a vast field of classical lore comprising the story of Troy, the story of Thebes and the history of Alexander. Dares' poem *De Excidio Troia Historia* and Dictys' *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* were translated into Latin verse in the sixth century A.D.—how accurately it is impossible to tell, since the original Greek version has not survived. To the Middle Ages these Latin poems counted for more than Homer and they were frequently translated.

The Norman conquest of Britain gave a wide currency to these stories. Contacts with the Near East during the Crusades played their part too in stimulating the native English imagination, as is seen in thé story of *Floris and Blanchefleur*, which introduces oriental colour, infidel enemies and a wealth of fictitious episodes.

In the relative security that followed the Norman conquest conditions of life in England improved and for nearly two hundred years many of the best French writers came to live at the English Court. These *trouveres* were chroniclers and they brought to the "matter of Troye" an impassioned patriotism, as both Norman and Britons claimed their descent from the Trojans and thus the popularity of the pro-Trojan Dares was

ensured throughout the Middle Ages. During this period too in monasteries diligent scribes, with cold fingers and aching eyes, were laboriously copying in their crabbed handwriting manuscripts that through the *Chansons de Geste* and the *Romans d'Aventure* added knowledge of Charlemagne and his knights to the Celtic stories of Arthur.

Famous among these *trouveres* was Benoit de Sainte-Maure, who lived at the Court of Henry II and translated Dares into a metrical romance of 30,000 lines—*le Roman de Troie*. While ostensibly deriving his material from the Latin poem which was quite short, he embroidered and romanticized the classical theme. The Greek and Trojan heroes become medieval knights, the heroines medieval ladies. Benoit moreover tells, in detail and possibly for the first time, the story of Troilus and Cressida, whom he correctly calls Briseide. This was the romantic story that inspired Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Another contributor was the Italian Guido delle Collonne, who spent some years in England at the end of the thirteenth century. His book—*Historia Troiana*, a prose translation of *le Roman de Troie*—is drawn to a large extent from Dictys. Guido's history became the standard account of the Trojan War and as such was used by Chaucer and Lydgate.

Meanwhile British writers were not idle. Geoffrey of Monmouth, the chronicler who perhaps became Bishop of St. Asaph, was busy creating a corpus of romantic stories with Arthur as their hero. Anticipating Sir John Mandeville, Geoffrey posed as a true historian translating from an old and precious book handed to him, so he said, by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. Unluckily for Geoffrey's reputation, this book was not known to any other chronicler of the time, and Ranulf Higden, author of the *Polychronicon*, and William of Newburgh, both contemporary historians, doubted his veracity. Modern scholarship is prepared to allow that Geoffrey, who did live, after all, on the Welsh border, had access to documents now lost and to oral tradition.[1]

In his *Historia Regum Britanniae* Geoffrey gives an account of the kings who dwelt in Britain before Christ. His known sources were Gildas, Bede, and Nennius, the latter a ninth-century authority, traditional author of *Historia Britonum*, who lived in Mercia and who described the historical Arthur

[1] In fact the *liber* to which Geoffrey referred has been identified with the Welsh *Brut*.

and his great battles, twelve in number, against the Saxons.[2] Beginning with the story of Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, Geoffrey followed the adventures of his country through the mists or Arthurian legend, garnering the prophecies of Merlin, and, in spite of the protests of fellow chroniclers, gained general acceptance for his history. The *Historia Regum Britanniae* was translated into Anglo-Norman verse by Gaimar and by Wace, into English alliterative verse by Layamon in the *Brut*, and by Robert of Gloucestere. For three hundred years the work circulated in manuscript before it was ultimately printed in Paris in 1508. Native puritanism in the person of Walter Map, who wrote *Lancelot*, the *Quest of the Holy Grail* and the *Morte d' Arthur*, was responsible for giving the story of Arthur its moral and religious character by condemning the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere. Their guilty passion he maintained was responsible for destroying the traditions of Knighthood and the great fellowship of the Round Table.

On the whole the treatment of love in medieval times, no matter what the source, owed more to Chivalry than to the pagan world. Minstrels and troubadours sang of romantic love in which spirit and sensuality mingled—the madness of Tristan and Isolde, the tragic happiness of Lancelot and Guinevere. Courts of Love were set up where the rights and duties of lovers and co-lovers were scrupulously defined and where concern for the conventions of love gave rise to interminable dialogues of scholastic subtlety. Although such love often found its highest fulfilment in frustration or death, it would be wrong to suppose that this elusive Eros was unchallenged. Native tales of sensual indulgence are met with as earthy as any in the Greek world. In Chaucer the *Miller's Tale* stands side by side with *Palamon and Arcite*.

Throughout the fourteenth century people remained content with rhymed romances—*Robin Hood and Maid Marian*, the incredible adventures of *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Guy of Warwick* were great favourites. Battles with giants jostled episodes of medieval piety; miracle supported oracle, for the Middle Ages were nothing if not eclectic. An army of minstrels, travelling from place to place, told tales in verse,

[2] Geoffrey's system is undoubtedly based on William of Malmesbury's *Chronicle of the Kings of England*.

interminable tales, but tales, as Sir Philip Sidney said, which held children from play and old men from the chimney corner. Their stock-in-trade as they left the great houses for the towns and villages would be a little behind the times; but gradually the heroic legends of battles with monsters and gold-greedy dragons were relegated to the nursery, and the strolling minstrels, too, began to sings songs of knightly love. Even with the coming of the printing press only the leisured classes and professional men and their wives could read; but the people, while technically illiterate, had a great body of common knowledge. Every village knew the lives of the saints and the stories of the Worthies. The people possessed a whole mythology of necromancers, sibyls and magicians, and a man who had heard of Alexander the Great would quite naturally know the name of his horse.

In spite of such a wealth of story-telling nothing has yet appeared that resembles a novel. Had Chaucer written in prose it is possible that his *Troilus and Criseyde* and not Richardson's *Pamela* would be celebrated as the first English novel. For in this poem Chaucer told a human story and told it naturally with delicacy, humour and a psychological insight, surprising for the period, into the workings of the human heart. His tenderness towards Criseyde, his subtle understanding of the temptations that beset her in the Greek camp and her pathetic but unsuccessful desire to be faithful to her absent lover reveal a rare quality of understanding not seen again outside the drama until Richardson created Clarissa. But prose, the only acceptable medium for the novel, developed slowly in England and the promise inherent in this little masterpiece was not fulfilled for more than three centuries.

A new departure in fiction is marked by the translation in 1377, from the French, of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville.* At first the adventures of this English knight, his journeyings as far as Palestine and China, were accepted as authentic, and fantastic experiences among peoples and monsters delighted a credulous age. Actually it was all fiction cleverly disguised as fact, very much in the manner of Defoe three hundred years later.

In the fifteenth century the invention of printing gave a tremendous impetus to story-telling and helped to spread the taste for prose fiction. Oddly enough, it was a man of mediocre ability—William Caxton—who gave English prose a

much needed simplicity and idiomatic clearness, and in so doing laid the foundations of that essential for the novel—a reading public. Caxton, who had lived for many years in France, was charmed by the elegance and ease of French prose and these qualities he tried to give to his translation of the *Receuil des Histoires de Troye* (1474). The choice of subject was interesting. As a sensible businessman Caxton preferred prose to verse, but he was alive to the taste of the time and the *matter of Troye* was sitll a prime favourite; so he printed romances on his press at Westminster. In this way the spirit of the Middle Ages was kept alive in the minds of new generations of readers—and as time went on epitomes and shortened versions of the romances, along with ballads based on them, found their way into the pedlar's pack and were carried into the towns and villages of Tudor England.

It was the great popularity of romance that led Caxton to publish Sir Thomas Malory's translation of the *Morte d' Arthur*. This prose work, a compilation from many sources, is, in fact, a huge rambling treasure-house of romantic chivalry.

Knights of Logres and of Lyonnesse
Lancelot and Pelleas and Pelinore.

The time when chivalry in England was dying, in the blood and dishonour that characterized the Wars of the Roses, was, perhaps, a fitting moment to write such a book.

Sir Thomas Malory, whose identity is perhaps not yet fully established, lived through the period, and the tragic conflicts of the age which seemed to threaten the destruction of all that was fine and noble, awoke in him a nostalgia for the past. To assuage a longing for escape he recalled the old world of chivalry in its prime and set his Arthurian legends in a fairy realm where there was neither winter nor spring, where gardens and landscapes glowed with beauty, and pinnacled castles glittered through silver mist. The magic atmosphere he created enchanted romance writers for generations to come.

Some poignancy is given to Malory's work by his own position as a supporter of the Lancastrian order, and his lament at the evils of civil war and the desolation it was causing in England can be heard in his yearning for the golden age of Arthur before the guilty passion of Lancelot and the treachery of Mordred destroyed it. Malory's work has the

haunting sadness of an autumn that will be followed by no spring. The *Morte d'Arthur* was available in several editions to Sir Philip Sidney. Caxton printed it in 1485, Wynkyn de Worde in 1498 and 1529, and Copland in 1557. It triumphed despite the moralists who disapproved and inveighed against it, Ascham declaring; "I know when God's Bible was banished the Court and *Le Morte d'Arthur* received into the princes chamber."

Equally popular at the time were the translations of Froissart's *Chronicles of England, France and Spain*, and of *Huon of Bordeaux* and by them the tradition of Chivalry was carried on into the next century. Even Sir Walter Scott was much indebted to this best of all the romantic chroniclers. "Whoever has taken up the chronicle of Froissart must have been dull indeed if he did not find himself transported back to the days of Cressy and Poictiers. . . . This sort of colloquial history is of all others the most interesting. In Froissart, we hear the gallant knights, of whom he wrote, arrange the terms of combat and the manner of the onset; we hear their soldiers cry their war-cries: we see them strike their horses, with the spur; and the liveliness of the narration hurries us along with them into the whirlwind of battle. We have no hesitation to say that a skirmish before a petty fortress, thus told, interests us more than the general information that twenty thousand Frenchmen bled on the field of Cressy. This must ever be the case, while we prefer a knowledge of mankind to a mere acquaintance with their action; and so long also must we account Froissart the most entertaining and perhaps the most valuable historian of the Middle Ages."

By this time prose had established itself as the accepted medium for romances; the story could be told with greater simplicity and ease and any loss of the quaintness and charm possessed by the older verse forms was offset by the growing naturalness, at any rate, in the method of narration. This battle between prose and verse is germane to the essence of the novel. Until the organic need for a natural prose style as the only suitable medium was recognized, the novel as a special genre could not exist. A novel in verse is a literary monstrosity, for metre is artificial and implies an emotional heightening, a formal discipline that life rarely permits us to achieve. The language of vision is rarely the language of life. Vision is the intermittent ecstasy, not the daily bread of life with which the novel is primarily concerned.

Strangely enough, both in Greek and English literature the beginnings of the novel belong to the aftermath of greatness ; in Greece the romance appeared only in the Alexandrine period of decline ; in Elizabethan England it was slighted by those writers who are the glory of the age. Had Marlowe, Shakespeare or Webster written novels it is likely they would have anticipated Dostoievski, and the English novel would have matured as the Russian did. As it is we have no novel of equal power and significance to set beside Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. One consequence of this late development of prose fiction was the absence of any conscious art in telling a story. Excellence was the result of chance, not design. No Aristotle defined the laws of the novel or made clear its aesthetic function ; at best it was regarded as a kind of prose epic. The finest Greek example of this type—the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus—has a highly dramatic plot enlivened with countless episodes.

Artistically a disadvantage, the absence of a formal aesthetic did at least ensure freedom from such classical restraints as influenced the drama. Unhampered by conventions the novel was able to adapt itself to changing contemporary demands. Through experiment, or more often by chance, it found the most effective means of expression. It became a mirror reflecting society, sensitive to the myriad changing forms that social prejudice and political passions created.

Paramount among the influences fostering the growth of Elizabethan prose fiction were the translations of the old Greek and Latin romances rediscovered at the Renaissance. Without these classical experiments in story-telling it is doubtful if the novel of today would have developed as it did. At a time when narratives were clogged with the medieval unrealities which bemused the brain of Don Quixote these lively stories from Alexandrine Greece and Imperial Rome introduced a much-needed realism. If the adventures described were often fantastic, at least they happened to people of flesh and blood. By 1579 many of the great works of ancient and modern times had been translated into English, and almost all of them by 1608. Some of these translations formed current reading and became as popular as the best writing of English authors. Certain of them in fact exercised an influence equal to that of the masterpieces of the age. Chief among the works translated in Elizabethan England were two famous

romances from the Greek, the *Ethiopian History* of Heliodorus and *Clotophon* and *Leucippe*, the picaresque, bloodthirsty tale by Achilles Tatius, written in the third century A.D.

From the Latin came the *Satyricon* of Petronius, a brilliantly realistic satire of which only a fragment—the Dinner of Trimalchio—remains. This little masterpiece of vividness and naturalness written in an easy colloquial style would be a more inspring book if the characters in it were less vile and contemptible. In fact, authors of the more sadistic crime fiction of today might be surprised to learn of their kinship to the Latin writer. More attractive in theme was the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius long famed for the jewelled loveliness of its style and the enchanting story of Cupid and Psyche.

The greatest of these ancient romancers was Longus, whose exquisite pastoral *Daphnis and Chloe* was known to the Elizabethans through the French translation of Amyot. Here the sophisticated innocence of the old world, serene from knowing too much, offered a new field, fresh and congenial, that appealed to the Elizabethan love of artful simplicity. Arcadia—that imaginary world of beautiful shepherds and shepherdesses, of purling brooks, orchards and valleys where nothing ever seemed to grow old and the only purpose of life was to love—was perhaps never more than a literary convention, but it was no less delightful for being unrelated to reality.

Three distinct types of modern fiction can be traced to these old romances ; from Heliodorus came the novel of adventure seen at its finest in the work of Fielding, Scott and Dumas; Achilles Tatius and Petronius inspired the picaresque novel of purely external action of which Smollett's provide excellent examples ; from Longus came the romantic love story—and his descendants are legion. Heliodorus is vigorous, self-confident and masculine. His exuberant vitality of imagination is seen in his plots, which are exceedingly intricate but never confused. With amazing verve and skill Heliodorus, in the *Ethiopian History*, guides the reader through bewildering adventures, starting with the compromising birth of a white skinned daughter to the Ethiopian queen—on through piracy, hair-breadth escapes, tempests, oracles, even blood sacrifice, but he does fail to provide that essential of all good romance—a happy ending with hero and heroine united in marriage.

Longus, on the other hand, cared little for the plot of

external action; for the bustle and excitement of advanture he substituted interest in the human heart. Serenely and with infinite charm and delicacy he tells the story of two children, Daphnis and Chloe, found under mysterious circumstances by a simple shepherd and brought up by him as his own, although "their beauty appears too excellent to suit with rusticks, or derive at all from clowns." In the island of Lesbos where they live Daphnis becomes a goatherd while Chloe tends her sheep and the story relates how love for each other gradually awakened within them and realized itself. After a few simple adventures the tale ends, as all romances should, with marriage, but not before the identities of the hero and heroine have been rightly established.

The charm of Longus lay partly in his style, so apparently artless and in keeping with the simplicity of his theme, and partly in the grace and beauty of his Arcadian setting, with its rural sights and sounds and customs. But his greatest contribution to fiction lay in his subtle revelation of the workings of the human heart, not in figures of epic grandeur, but in a simple girl and boy. The Elizabethan debt to Longus is clearly seen in the [pastoral romances of Robert Greene—*Pandosto* and *Menaphon*—and in the *Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie*, of Thomas Lodge—a pastoral romance dramatized by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*. Two great masters of the novel, Richardson in the eighteenth century and Proust in the tweentieth, follow in the tradition of Longus in making the human heart their chief study and in subordinating the plot of external action to interest in psychology.

Apart from the classical models a flood of translations from contemporary Italian, French and Spanish authors brought fresh stimuli to quicken native powers of narration. Prose fiction everywhere in Elizabethan England bears the imprint of adaptations and derivation from alien sources. Compilations of stories were extremely popular and those of the Italian Bandello and the Frenchman Belleforest offered an inexhaustible quarry from which dramatists, moralists and romancers could draw at will.

In an age eager to learn from any who would teach, in love with high romance, and not over-exacting in its desire for entertainment, any wit could command success by combining novelty and tradition. That certainly was the experience of John Lyly whose *Euphues : the Anatomy of Wit* was

published in 1579. This book, the first important romance in Elizabethan literature, is largely based on North's *Diall of Princes* and Castiglione's *Courtier*, which Sir Thomas Hoby translated from the Italian in 1561. Castiglione's study of the perfect courtier was a treatise on manners for the new age of humanistic culture, enlightenment and wealth which the revival of Antiquity and the discovery of America had brought into existence. At the courts of Renaissance dukes and princes, men and women mingled with a new freedom, the women enjoyed the same education as the men and brought to their mutual discussions a gracious sweetness and delicacy.

The plot of *Euphues* is very slender and simply served as a peg on which to hang discourses, conversations and letters mainly on the subject of love. In the first part Euphues, a handsome Athenian, visits Naples (in reality London) and strikes up a friendship with Philautus, who introduces him into society. Ignoring the sage counsels of an old man, Euphues turns aside from virtue and wisdom and plunges into the riotous life of the wicked city ; he meets the mistress of his friend, falls in love with her and is only saved from disloyalty by her fickleness in jilting him for a third suitor. This incident provokes diatribes against women in general and some fine moralizing from the now reformed Euphues.

In 1580 Lyly published a sequel—*Euphues and his England*—in which the two friends, united by their common disappointment, travel to England, where Philautus becomes the central figure. He falls in love with Camilla, but in spite of his prayers and devotions his suit is rejected ; after much inveighing against the cruelty of women he consoles himself with a less exacting lady. Seeing his friend securely married, Euphues prepares to return to Greece and on his way back sends the Neapolitan ladies an unexpected present—*A Glasse for Europe*—nothing less than a panegyric on Queen Elizabeth and a glorious tribute to the ladies of England. Lyly is convincad that none equals them in beauty, virtue or wit : he writes only for them ; Euphues "had rather lye shut up in a ladyes casket than open in a schollers studie." Thus ended a romance more famed for its style than its story. Based on excessive use of antithesis emphasized by cross alliteration, this style is so peculiarly artificial and ornate in its balance and symmetry as to suggest a disease of language. Desire to load every rift with ore led Lyly to introduce elaborate similes

and analogies from the countless bestiaries, herbaries and lapidaries of the Middle Ages which all stemmed from Pliny the Elder's unnatural *Natural History*.

The following extract from Robert Greene's *Carde of Fancie*, a successful imitation of Euphues, is a fair example of the fantastic "euphuistia" style :

> Now there remained in the Court, a young knight, called Signor Valericus, who by chance casting his glancing eies on the glittering beautie of Castania, was so fettered in the snare of fancie, and so entangled with the trap of affection, so perplexed in the Laborinth of pinching love, and so inchaunted with the charme of Venus Sorcerie, that as the Elephant rejoyceth greatlie at the sight of a Rose, as the Bird Halciones delighteth to view the feathers of the Phoenix, and as nothing better contenteth the Roebuck, than to gaze at a red cloth, so there was no object that could allure the wavering eies of Valericus, as the surpassing beautie of Castania, yea, his onlie blisse, pleasure, joy, and delight, was feeding his fancie with staring on the heavenlie face of his Goddesse. But alasse her beautie bredde his bane, her lookes, his losse, her sight his sorrow, her exquisite perfections his extreame passions, that as the Ape by seeing the Snaile is infected, as the Leopard falleth in a trance at the sight of the Locust, as the Cockatrice dieth with beholding the Chrisolite, so poor Valericus was pinched to the heart with viewing her comelie countenance, was griped with galing griefe, and tortured with insupportable torments, by gazing upon the gallant beautie of so gorgious a dame: yea, he so framed in his fancie the forme of her face, and so imprinted in his heart the perfection of her person, that the remembraunce thereof would suffer him to take no rest, but he passed the daie in dolour, the night in sorrow, no minute without mo[u]rning, no houre without heaviness, that falling into pensive passions he began thus to parle with himselfe.

Such a "conceited" style must seem absurd today but it was not without its uses in its own time; the conscious exercise of the mind in finding required vowel and consonant patterns gave a new suppleness, even elegance, to prose. Manners of speech were affected too by the vogue, for Elizabeth and her courtiers talked Euphues until the idiom died a natural death from its own excesses.

But Lyly's success as a romancer was swallowed up in the *eclat* which greeted Sir Philip Sidney's romance. *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, published posthumously

in 1590 although it had circulated in manuscript for nearly a decade.

Sidney was the only outstanding writer of the age to devote himself to prose fiction. His strange romance, which Hazlitt declared was "one of the greatest monuments to the abuse of intellectual power upon record," was supposedly written during a temporary exile from Court to please his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. Its genesis, however, was undoubtedly more significant, although the courtly nonchalance which made aristocratic writers conceal their enthusiasm led Sidney to dismiss it as "a trifle, and that triflinglie handled"—an understatement which misled later generations. The Elizabethans admired the work and regarded it as the best of Sidney's contributions to literature.

The framework of the story, the atmosphere and many of the incidents were derivative, being largely influenced by the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, which Sidney knew in the original, Montemayor's Spanish pastoral romance *Diana Enamorada*, and the Neapolitan author Sannazzaro's *Arcadia*, a pastoral in prose and verse.

Sidney, unlike Lyly, made no attempt to imitate the manners of everyday life; his conceptions were poetic and his characters live at an unnatural pitch of intensity. Rejecting the popular euphuistic vein, he adapted his style to the theme and the characters, now dazzling and resplendent, now tender and homely, now serious, now ironic. Everything which was then considered necessary to epic magnificence is to be found in *Arcadia*—tragedy, comedy, religious musings, eclogues, elegies and songs—for Sidney's purpose was to depict every aspect of vice and virtue in an exciting romance of adventure that should also serve as a political allegory intended to entertain and instruct. A profound respect for the true code of chivalry is one of the things he wanted to teach his age; another was that purity of heart alone can triumph over evil.

The main thread of this complicated narrative is as follows:

Pyrocles and Musidorus, son and nephew respectively to Euarchus, the King of Macedon and devoted friedns, are wrecked on the coast of Laconia and separated by pirates. Unknown to each other they find their way to Arcadia—a land of perpetual sunshine, of meadows and valleys watered by crystalline streams, where the landscape is broken by hills crowned with stately trees under which shepherdesses, of

flawless beauty, listen to handsome shepherds piping tales of happy love, while fleecy sheep and their playful lambs feed securely on grass that is perennially enamelled with flowers. Basileus, the king of this earthly paradise, frightened by an oracle, has retired with his wife from the Court to bring up his two daughters Pamela and Philoclea in rural seclusion as shepherdesses, leaving Philanax to reign as regent. Meanwhile in the course of many knightly adventures Musidorus discovers Pyrocles only to lose him again, for the latter has fallen in love with a portrait of Pamela and to gain access to her disguises himself as an Amazon princess, Zelmane. While searching for his elusive friend Musidorus himself falls in love with Philoclea and assumes the name and occupation of Dorus—a shepherd boy. After many experiences these disguises are pierced, the ladies accept the love of the strange knights, and all is set for a hymeneal climax, when the wicked enchantress Cecropia arrives and carries off Pamela, Philoclea and the still disguised Pyrocles. Besieged in the castle where she holds them captive, she tries by the most cruel devices to make one or other of the sisters marry her own son Amphialus.

By the time this menace is overcome the plot has become infinitely complicated, for both Basileus and his queen have fallen in love with the supposed Zelmane, the King believing him to be a woman, Gynecia, having seen through the disguise, knowing him to be a man. An entertaining and piquant scene ensues in which they both make assignations with Zelmane in a cave and are mutually compromised.

The sequel is unfortunate, for the Queen, suspecting Zelmane's fidelity, prepares a love potion which Basileus unwittingly drinks and falls apparently dead. Philanax is now left with the State in disorder; the King is dead, the Queen a murderess, the two Princesses dishonoured. While he weighs the offences Euarchus, King of Macedon, arrives and is invited to give judgment. His decision is draconian; the Queen is to be buried alive with the corpse of her husband, Philoclea to be sent to a nunnery, Pyrocles to be thrown from a high tower and Musidorus beheaded. Amid the consternation and dismay caused by this heavy sentence a stranger bursts into the court and tells Euarchus he has doomed his own long-lost son and his nephew. For a while justice wars against love, but Euarchus hesitates to quash a sentence decreed by the strict

laws of Arcadia. Justice, he maintains, must be done, although he condemns himself to lifelong desolation. Luckily at this moment Basileus, whose potion was not lethal, awakes and amid the general confusion is made to understand what has happened. He forgives the Queen, a general pardon follows, and the story ends with pomp and magnificence in the masque-like splendour of the marriage ceremonies.

It is unlikely that this strange tale of chivalry and adventure, of love and friendship, politics and war was written merely to while away a summer holiday. Such an explanation is not consistent with Sidney's careful revision of the work, while his oft-quoted desire when he lay dying, that it should be destroyed, might suggest that in an age of political censorship he recognized the implicit danger to his family in allowing such an obvious political allegory to survive him. Sidney was an ardent Protestant and a patriot, the times were urgent and the power of Spain as yet unbroken. In a period when the health and welfare of the State depended upon the character of the prince Sidney's purpose was undoubtedly the same as Spenser's in *The Faere Queene* and Shakespeare's in the historical plays, namely to set forth the principles of right conduct in princes and to show what dangers threaten the realm where the king is weak and foolish.

Some colour is lent to this theory by the fact that Sidney disapproved of the proposed marriage of Elizabeth to the Duke of Anjou and was forced for a time to withdraw from the Court—this time he spent in writing *Arcadia*. Basileus, the superstitious amorist who neglected his kingly duties, may be intended as a warning to Elizabeth herself given over to amorous dalliance. Cecropia could be a study of Mary Queen of Scots or Catherine de Medici, both alike hateful to the Protestant Sidney, while Philanax, the regent, may well be Sidney's father-in-law. Sir Francis Walsingham, and Mary's deadly enemy. Euarchus is clearly a picture of the ideal king whose energy, determination and fixity of purpose are contrasted with the sloth and foolishness of Basileus. Such resemblance between historical personages and characters in fiction were common in Elizabethan times.

So successful was *Arcadia* that ten editions were published before 1600 and it was actually turned into a play by James Shirley. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the chief episodes suffered the common fate of outmoded romances

and appeared epitomized in cheap books. As late as 1725 Mrs. Stanley prepared a modern version that was possibly the one Samuel Richardson read and in which he found the name for his servant-girl heroine of the first genuine English novel. Widespread as the interest in courtly romances was, it confined itself to educated and aristocratic circles. Popular taste was satisfied by the realistic pamphlets written by men like Greene, Nashe and Dekker, who played an important part in creating modern journalism. In these writers the native stream of coarse, racy humour flowed freely and their tales of low life and ingenious rascality led the way to satirical, realistic fiction.

Robert Greene, the first Elizabethan to discover that personal experience had a literary value, belonged to that lively band of university wits who were busy providing plays for the common players and romances for the courtly reader. His life, a picaresque story in itself, was one of strange vicissitudes. He travelled about on the continent visiting Italy and Spain, seeing and practising, according to himself, "all sorts of villiany and abomination," deserted his wife, but continued to idealize her, lived for a time with the sister of Ned Browne, the most notorious cut-throat of the town, and died, so it was said, in dire poverty of a surfeit of Rhenish wine and pickled herring provided by his friends.

In 1591 Greene published *The Notable Discoverie of Coosnage*, an exposure of the deceits practised on honest citizens by the cardsharpers, pickpockets and blackmailers who frequented Elizabethan London. Greene's device, a rabbit (cony) holding a playing-card in each paw with dice strewn in front and flagons in the background, which appeared on the frontispiece, soon became famous. Here in a vivid sequence the mysteries of roguery were laid bare—the cant terms explained, manoeuvres described, so that the cheating fraternity soon complained that Greene was taking away their living, as "every country bumpkin for the price of three pence can read Master R.G." and was able to "smoke" (discover) the oldest master of the craft.

Greene entered with such gusto into the world of rogues it is hard to believe his knowledge was derived only from Harmon's *Caveat to Common Cursetors* (1567) or Audeley's *Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561).

Emboldened by the popularity of the first pamphlet, he

published the second and third parts of *Conny-Catching* in 1592 and followed them by the *Blacke Bookes Messenger*, an account of the life and death of Ned Browne.

Greene presented himself as the champion of the simple citizen against the knaves, although his life was threatened by the rogues, who were hard put to it to devise fresh tricks. Excitement was maintained and plausibility given to the pamphlets by the appearance in 1592 of what was apparently a defence—*Cuthbert Conny-Catcher the Defence of Conny-Catching*. For the defence it is pointed out that "maister R.G. has been at great pains to expose poor rogues who, in truth, do little harm, but he has said nothing about the great rogues."

> For truth it is, that this is the Iron Age, wherein iniquitie hath the upper hande, and all conditions and estates of men seeke to live by their wittes, and he is counted wisest, that hath the deepest insight into the getting of gaines; euery thing now that is found profitable, is counted honest and lawfull: and men are valued by their wealth, not by their vertues Hee that cannot dissemble cannat liue, and men put their sonnes now a dayes Apprentises, not to learne trades and occupations, but craftes and mysteries. . . You straine Gnats, and passe over Elephants; you scoure the ponde of a fewe croakyng Frogges, and leaue behinde an infinite number of most venemous Scorpions. You decypher poore Conny-catchers, that perhaps with a tricke at cardes winne fortie shillings from a churle that can spare it, and neuer talke of those Caterpiliers that undoo the poore, ruine whole Lordships, infect the commonwealth, and delight in nothing but in wrongfull extorting and purloyning of pelfe, when as such be the greatest Conny-catchers of all, as by your leaue maister R.G. I wil make manifest.

Greene illustrates his theme with anecdotes that grow longer in the later pamphlets but nowhere does he show any desire to develop or to create characters. The last of the series *A Disputation between a Hee Conny-catcher and a Shee Conny-catcher* to decide whether a thief or a whore is most hurtful to the commonwealth is an illuminating contest in which, not unnaturally, the woman wins. "For women are the devil's chiefest brokers to bring the world to destruction. And so Nan let's sit down to our meal and be merry." In this pamphlet there is an anticipation of Heywood's sentiment in the story of a clothier who falls in love with a courtesan, reclaims her

and ultimately marries her. Already we look forward to Bunyan's world.

These pamphlets in spite of their liveliness and humour throw much light on the seamier side of Elizabethan life which changing social conditions were bringing into play. The curtain was ringing down on Merrie England. However blithe and merry the tales of roguery may be, however boisterous the moral denunciations, the fact was inescapable that there was a sore festering beneath the gap vesture of the age. Entranced by the spell cast over us by Elizabethan poetry, it is easy to forget the disorders that were rife.

The sixteenth century had seen a revolution in domestic architecture. Great mansions emblazoned with glass and magnificent of approach grew up out of the spoils of the dissolution of the monasteries. Gold, silver and jewels poured into the national coffers, the New World was ransacked to delight and adorn the Old and Renaissance splendour mocked austere simplicity. But the foundations of this new magnificence were unsound. The new manors and fine estates had been obtained by the dispossession of a class. The inflated values which brought fortunes to some had ruined many.

Efforts to solve the economic problems of the age are reflected in the numerous statutes and poor-law enactments. Unemployment was widespread—men, women and children thronged the high roads, many died of hunger beneath hedges, or, braving the wrath of authority, committed crimes of violence and were savagely punished. Poverty and disease stalked the same roads that were graced by the symbolic pageantry of the royal progresses. Nor were the changes confined to the wretched; all classes were affected.

Impoverished noblemen drifted to the Court in the hope that show, magnificence, a fine bearing, or some act of reckless courtesy would lead to fortune, and on this hazard they gambled away their manors and mortgaged their estates to buy the brave clothes that might please the Queen. The uncertainty that characterizes the period between the breakdown of one form of society and the emergence of another led to moral disorder.

London was filled with a restless crowd of place-seekers, hangers-on, eager for money, a prey to false allurements, engaging in mad colonial enterprises, setting off on evanescent treasure hunts. The competitive spirit of the time was remorse-

less and permitted no respite in the quest for honours, wealth. position: everywhere on the ruins of the old order new interests were being advanced, new men were coming into prominence. From the melting-pot of Elizabethan London came a heady and exhilarating, if deadly, brew. The romances may raise life to the level of poetry but the realistic pamphlets record the bitter hopes and savage despair—the black shadow that misery threw across the passage of time. Meanwhile in the background the middle classes were quietly consolidating themselves in the provinces, in the seaport towns and in the City.

Some explanation of the sympathy existing between English and Spanish literature at this period may be found in the similar economic and social changes taking place in the two countries. Spain, too, was in the melting-pot. Ruined and demoralized by war, the whole country was destitute; the gentry were reduced to miserable shifts to survive at all, while the lower classes, no longer susceptible to discipline, turned rogue and vagabond.

The famous book which mirrored the anarchy of the times in Spain is *Lazarillo de Tormes*, written in 1554 and translated into English in 1576 – a book which gave a new term, picaresque, to literature. It is the autobiography of a picaro (rogue), the son of a miller and a trull, who lived on the banks of the Tormes, near Salamanco. The boy began his career of wit and fraud as guide to a blind man, whose money and victuals he stole. Passing into the service of various poverty-stricken or rascally employers, he ultimately reached the position of town crier of Toledo, graduating to this office by being husband to the Archpriest's concubine. His career provided occasion for many satirical portraits of Spanish types. In a world of change there was only one philosophy for a picaro --nothing can be worse than the worst, and the only way to alleviate the ills of life was to laugh at their absurdity.

This intensely Spanish amalgam of moralistic sentiment, bitter humour, fantasy and passionate idealism inspired the brilliant pamphleteer, Thomas Nashe. A master of vituperative satire known to his contemporaries as the English Juvenal, Nashe rivalled Greene in his appeal to the taste for realism. His chief contribution to prose fiction was the picaresque tale *The Unfortunate Traveller, or The Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594), a story remarkable for its spirit and wit and for the

streak of tragic realism which runs through the chief episodes.

Jack Wilton, a mischievous young page in the army of Henry VIII, lives on his wits, playing tricks on a niggardly old victualler and other gullible occupants and gets whipped for his pains. Following the Earl of Surrey, Jack travels over Flanders, Germany and Italy, enjoying many adventures. Some of the people he meets belong to history. Thus at Munster he sees John of Leyden hanged ; he watches Erasmus write *In Praise of Folly*, hears Luther inveigh against the Pope, meets Aretine and even attends a seance held by the magician Cornalius Agrippa—whose occult powers impress him.

Nashe's story is larded with historical names and personalities introduced with lively skill. Wilton passes himself off as the Earl of Surrey and runs off with Diamante, an Italian courtesan. He is in Rome during an outbreak of the plague and it is at this point in the story that the episode—Cutwolfe's Revenge—occurs to which the book owes its fame. Esdras of Granado, a *bandetto*, having assisted the Pope in some murders, is given *carte blanche* for his own misdeeds. Together with Bartol, an Italian desperado, he plunders the stricken houses of rich men, for none brings help for fear of the contagion. On one of these occasions Jack is forced to witness an unparalleled scene of horror described by Nashe with passionate intensity and directness. The house of Heraclide, an Italian matron, has been visited by the plague, fourteen of her children have died in five days and her husband lies before her apparently a corpse. Into this scene of desolation Esdras comes ; excited by lust and greed, he violates Heraclide, and, left alone, she stabs herself.

The story moves from climax to dramatic suspense; the old husband wakes from a kind of death trance to a scene even more horrible than that which greeted the eyes of old Hieronimo in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. He searches the house for the assailants and finds Wilton, sword in hand, locked in a room, accuses him of murder and has him thrown into prison. This incident forms a link with the dramatic execution of Cutwolfe, the brother of Bartol, with which the book ends. Released from prison, Jack joins Diamante and they travel to Bologna, and on their way hear the confession and witness the torture and death of Cutwolfe, under sentence for a vendetta murder of Esdras. Nashe touches a contemporary

nerve of horror in the scene in which Cutwolfe, having tracked his victim down, forces him, in the hope of saving his life, to blaspheme horribly. This done

> The veyne in his left hand that is derived from the hart with no faint blow he pierst, and with the full bloud that flowed from it, writ a full obligation of his soule to the devill : yea, he more earnestly praid unto God never to forgive his soule, than many christians do to save their soules. These fearful ceremonies brought to an end, I bad him ope his mouth and gape wide. He did so (as what will not slaves do for feare ?) therewith made I no more ado, but shot him full into the throat with my pistoll : no more spake he after, so did I shoot him that he might never speake after or repent him. His bodie being dead lookt as blacke as a toad : the devil presently branded it for his owne. This is the falt that called me hether, no true Italian but will honor me for it. Revenge is the glorie of armes, and the highest performance of valure, revenge is whatso-ever we call law or justice.

By this time Jack has supped his fill of horrors ; he hastens to marry his courtesan, gives alms to the needy and within forty days has exchanged the Sodom of Italy for the English camp. The rape of Heraclide and Cutwolfe's revenge are so different in style from the rest of the book that some authorities would attribute them to another hand. In default of a claimant, however, credit for these two masterpieces of grim realism must be reserved for Nashe.

But Elizabethan prose fiction was not all romance or horror. A vein of domestic fiction that suggested the begining of documentary realism was contributed by Thomas Deloney, a ballad-maker who voiced popular grievances. As he tramped the high-roads peddling his songs he gained an accurate knowledge of English towns and villages at a time when the Medieval Guilds had given way to the domestic system of manufacture. With lyrical enthusiasm he described the craftsman's world in which the new middle classes were quietly and unobtrusively building up the wealth of England. Indifferent alike to Sidney's idealism and Greene's rascality, this class rejoiced in its solid comfort, manifested a strong sense of duty, was kindly towards its workpeople, and adventurous only in extending trade. The best of these tales is *Jacke of Newbury* (1597), which describes the rise of a weaver's apprentice who marries his master's widow—a lady

as little fitted for celibacy as the Wife of Bath—and becomes a famous and worthly clothier of England (and, "how hee set continually five hundred poore people at work, to the great benefit of the Common-wealth").

After the death of the widow, Jack chooses a maid for her comeliness and virtue, romantically dispensing with a dowry. The story tells of his successes and describes the visit of Henry VIII and Catherine to his workshop, where they see two hundred looms attended by contented workers weaving, carding and spinning. Already the morality of commerce is heard:

> The idle hand shall ever goe in a ragged garment, and the sloathfull live in reproach: but such as doe lead a vertuous life, and governe themselves discreetly, shall of the best be esteemed, and spend their daies in credit.

A touch of contemporary realism inspires the following passage:

> By meanes of the warres which our King had with other countries, many Merchant strangers were prohibited for coming to *England*, as also our owne Merchants (in like sort) were forbidden to have dealings with *France* or the Low-countries; by meanes whereof the Clothiers had most of their cloath lying on their hands, and that which they sold was at so low a rate that the money scantly paid for the wooll and workemanship. Whereupon they sought to ease themselves by abating the poore workemenes wages. And when that did not prevaile, they turned away many of their people, Weavers, Shearmen, Spinsters and Carders, so that where there was a hundred Looms kept in one towne, there was scant fifty: and hee that kept twenty put downe tenne. Many a poore man (for want of worke) was hereby undone, with his wife and children, and it made many a poore widow to sit with a hungry belly.

A supplication to the King directed by Jack is successful in getting trade restored, and once again the craftsmen of England enjoy prosperity.

In *The Gentle Craft* (1597–8) Deloney pays tribute to the cordwainers. In a series of short stories he surveys shoemaking from its legendary beginning through the great days of Simon Eyre—the merry shoemaker—who became Lord Mayor of London.

Thomas of Reading (1600), another saga of the clothiers, is a compendium of stories grave and gay achieving a climax

in the romantic wooing of Margaret of the lily hands by Duke Robert. Possibly Deloney was commissioned by the traders to write these idylls of industrial life—vivid in their almost Dutch realism—but no payment for such service has been recorded.

These lively annals of the middle class, distinguished by naturalness and simplicity, were a relief from the sombre villainy depicted by Nashe and Greene. The class portrayed was as yet untouched by Puritanism and unembittered by political conflict; in the pages of Deloney it breathed and worked in its native element, happy in warm obscurity to escape the destiny of the "wretched eminent things" that flashed and fell like meteors on the Elizabethan scene. In 1603 the Queen died and the glorious age of Elizabeth was over. The last years of her reign had proved dark and stormy. Favourable winds had given way to the tempests that were waiting to unleash their full horror against the ship of State. The light grew murky; in Webster, Tourneur and Middleton the drama became macabre and sinister; treachery and dishonour poisoned the atmosphere.

Thomas Dekker, who carried on the work of Greene and Nashe in his prose pamphlets, strikes a grimmer note than theirs. In *The Wonderful Years* (1603), which contains a poignant description of London during the plague of that year, *The Belman of London* (1608), a social satire, the *Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1609) and *News from Hell brought by the Devil's Carrier* (1606), vice and wrongdoing are exposed and denounced.

This new note of seriousness suggested that the struggle to save the soul of a people had entered, a new phaae. Dekker pointed the way to Bunyan and Defoe. But perhaps he is best remembered for his merry, satirical book of manners, *The Guls Hornebooke* (1609). An ironic guide to London, it attacked the fops and gallants of the day under the guise of instructing them how they might make themselves conspicuous in places of public resort by their offensive conduct. Here is one of the best pictures of the time—a witty record of taverns and their frequenters, of playhouses and their audiences, of the new-found delight in smoking and of the age-old fascination of fine clothes. Swindlers, ladies of the town, fools, scholars and gentlemen of fortune make up a picturesque world which was still everybody's oyster.

And so the story of Elizabethan prose fiction ends. What had been achieved in three centuries of story-telling? Certainly nothing that can be called a novel as the genre is known and recognized today. Admittedly all the familiar forms—romance, horror fiction, stories of domestic life are there in embryo, but as yet there is little characterization, plots are fantastically improbable or wildly incoherent, rare touches of psychology appear, but they are not developed. Everywhere there are sketches, hints, glimpses, possibilities—a latent puissance is suggested, but nothing more than that.

The reader does not yet find himself drawn by subtle empathy into a fictitious reality so that he becomes part of it. But certain conventions have emerged and fiction has freed itself from subservience to foreign models. Romance and realism are significantly distinguished and realism clearly identified with the vigorous portrayal of the low and ignoble, together with the sordid and the horrible—a tradition which, maintained and furthered by Defoe, is still with us in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, romance remained popular for a time, until, shorn of poetry, allegory and moral significance, it finally died, but not before it had bequeathed to fiction a predominantly feminine interest in love and the pleasant delusion that every love story should have a happy ending.

CHAPTER 2

Allegory, Adventure and Satire in the Seventeenth Century

LITTLE OR NO CHANGE in popular taste was reflected in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Romances and pamphlets continued to delight a growing body of readers But soon the more fastidious intellects began to be bored by them and turned with unfeigned pleasure to the Characteries —witty imitations of the Characters of Theophrastus. These analytical epitomes of the follies and foibles of men became fashionable at the beginning of the century and demanded less a zest for story-telling than a semi-scientific interest in the variations of human nature. Admittedly the Characteries are nearer to the essay than to the novel, but they have a long lineage from the epigrammatic sketches of Earle through the fully developed portraits of Sir Roger de Coverley and Will Honeycombe until they culminate in the life-sized studies of Sterne's Uncle Toby and Meredith's Sir Willoughby Patterne.

In these little collections of characters the salient figures in different spheres of society were shown. The method of presentation was a literary advance on anything so far encountered in prose fiction. Lucid delineation called for psychological coherence. The language of description became more precise as thought crystallized round the various types. For it was the type that the character-writer delighted in. Pronounced types were more interesting and noticeable than normally balanced individuals. The psychology of the day was still linked to the medieval theories of personality based on the "humours" as the outcome of a definite equation between the elements of earth, air, fire and water.

Among the many writers of Characteries may be mentioned Sir Thomas Overbury, who published in 1614 *Twenty One Prose Portraits*, the most widely known of which is the study of the "fayre and happy Milkmaid," a charming piece touched with sentiment and pathos. Ben Jonson, who had already shown himself a master of the psychology of humours in his plays, tried his hand at prose portraits in *Timber, or Discoveries made upon Men and Matters.* In 1615 John Stevens, a young lawyer, followed in the steps of Overbury with his *Satyrical Essays, Characters and Others.* But the most

successful of the writers of brief, graphic description of various human failings was John Earle, whose *Microcosmographie* was published in 1628.

John Earle was chaplain to Charles I and after the execution of the King he went into exile, but returned at the Restoration and became Bishop of Worcester and Salisbury. The *Microcosmographie* was inspired by the classical characters of Theophrastus and the tone is predominantly satirical or ironic.

Earle allied a coherent and balanced judgment and a cinct style full of gentle humour to a shrewd and lively wit. His portraits pass before us delicately arrayed. The child

> Is a man in a small letter, yet the best copy of Adam before he tasted of Eve or the apple.. . .His soul is yet a white paper unscribbled with observations of the world, wherewith, at length, it becomes a blurred note-book. He is purely happy, because be knows no evil, nor hath made means by sin to be acquainted with misery. . . His hardest labour is his tongue, as if he were loath to use so deceitful an organ; and he is best company with it when he can but prattle. . . . Could he put off his body with his little coat, he had got eternity without a burden, and exchanged but one heaven for another.

A touch of the satirical whip flicks the young gentleman of the University who "Is one that comes there to wear a gown, and to say hereafter, he has been at the university. His father sent him hither because he heard there were the best fencing and dancing schools; from these he has his education, from his tutor the oversight."

Anglican dislike of Puritan excess is amusingly shown in the study of a precise hypocrite who

> Is one in whom good women suffer, and have their truth misinterpreted by her folly. . . . She doubts of the virgin Mary's salvation and dares not saint her, but knows her own place in heaven as perfectly as the pew she has a key to. She is so taken up with faith she has no room for charity, and understands no good works but what are wrought on the sampler. She accounts nothing vices but superstition and an oath, and thinks adultery a less sin than to swear *by my truly*. ... She overflows so with the bible, that she spills it upon every occasion, and will not cudgel her maids without scripture. It is a question whether she is more troubled with the Devil, or the Devil with her : She

> is always challenging and daring him, and her weapon [*is the Practice of Piety*]. Nothing angers her so much as that women cannot preach, and in this point only thinks the Brownist erroneous; but what she cannot at the church she does at the table, where she prattles more than any against sense and Antichrist, till a capon's wing silence her.

A plodding scholar is one who "has a strange forced appetite to learning, and to achieve it brings nothing but patience and a body."

A great man is defined by Earle as

> so much heraldry without honour, himself less real than his title. His virtue is, that he was his father's son, and all the expectation of him to beget another. A man that lives merely to preserve another's memory, and let us know who died so many years ago.

The pithy, neat antitheses which the portraits encouraged helped to give a much-needed precision to English prose style, while these brief analyses prepared the way for the fuller studies of later times. Some one hundred and fifty of these collections were published in the seventeenth century, a tribute to their popularity, but during the Civil War they became more bitterly sectarian and political. Regaining grace and variety once more in the hands of Addison and Steele, the character-study was ready for the polished pen of a Goldsmith,

By the middle decades of the seventeenth century three main types of readers had emerged: the high-bred enthusiasts, the devotees of the heroic French romances who welcomed Gauthier de Costes '*Pharamond*. who read with delight the *Astree* of Honore D'Urfé and ensured the success of the long line of Mme de Scuderyes novels; the wits who preferred the Theophrastean Characteries; the realists who enjoyed tales of low life and rascality and whose taste was gratified by the many translations of Spanish and French picaresque novels. The most celebrated of these was *The Rogue, or Guzman of Alfarache*, the successor of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which was translated into English in 1622.

Guzman is by turns scullion, thief, gentleman, beggar, soldier, page to a cardinal and to a French ambassador; his career of roguery and violence gives occasion for sketches of characters and humorous descriptions to which it would be

difficult to produce anything superior. Guzman inspired a long line of "rogue" memoirs.

In 1652 *The English Guzman* was published and followed by Walter Pope's *Memoirs of M. de Vall* 1670 and the *Life and Death of Gamaliel Ratsey* in 1685. Ratsey was a Nottinghamshire highwayman hanged at Bedford in 1605 and he was succeeded in literature by a long file of highwaymen, professional pickpockets and other criminals whose records of roguery were kept alive right down to the time of Defoe. A vast mass of infamous tales was explored by two English hack writers, Richard Head and Francis Kirkman, who pilfered from every known source and who published a disreputable collection of unsavoury stories in serial form called *The English Rogue*. First published in 1665, this collection was still being adapted to suit the taste of the time with a new hero in 1776.

An interesting, though minor, development of didactic fiction that anticipated Bunyan can be seen in the religious allegory of John Reynolds called *The Triumph of God's Revenge against the Sinne of Murther*; in Richard Bernard's *Isle of Man or the Legall Proceedings in Manshire against Sinne* (1626) and the doctrinaire Utopias cast in the form of fiction such as Barclay's *Argenis*. In the latter, historical personages are introduced under classical names and include Philip II of Spain, Catherine de Medici and Queen Elizabeth. Another work of this kind was Samuel Hartlib's *Description of the famous Kingdom of Marcaria*, which contains discussions on agricultural and educational policy.

Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) may have owed something to Bacon's Utopian scientific romance *The New Atlantis*, but such studies remain curiosities to political theory in the guise of fiction and contribute little of the development of the novel. Strangely enough, in the twentieth century moral allegory made a belated return to fiction in the novels of C.S. Lewis.

It was from France, however, that new ideas and fresh stimulation came. Possibly the presence of a French queen may have quickened interest in French literature, but Honore D'Urfé's *Astrée* had already appeared in 1607 and enjoyed a success as immediate as it was enduring. For many decades France was to supply English readers with the bulk of their romances. French fiction was at this time more advanced in

form and style—it had matured while English fiction was still largely experimental. The French brought a certain chastening of the imagination, they recognized love as the sovereign passion, and they assigned the chief place in fiction to women.

In the *Astree* chivalric adventure was still linked to pastoral romance in the manner of Sidney's *Arcadia*, and both developed with an appalling leisureliness that only a more spacious and less time-conscious age could have endured. As it is, it is doubtful if the many readers who had followed the romance of Celadon and Astrea, with its seventy subordinate histories, for nearly twenty years were in a condition to appreciate the final happiness of the lovers. The novelty of the *Astrèe* lies in the domination of the theme of love, which is treated with subtle analysis at many levels of human experience from impassioned idealism to witty cynicism. The book has felicitous touches of nature and its setting is that of the actual French countryside and not some imaginary realm of fairyland. Its plot, too, derived from intrigues at the Court of Henri IV. *Astrèe* started a cult in the salons then flourishing in France and it became what one writer has called the breviary of a social revolution.

Another woman writer, Madeleine de Scudèry, enjoyed a comparable success with her principal work *Artamene, ou le Grand Cyrus* (ten volumes, 1649—53), which dealt with the love of the youthful Cyrus, grandson of the King of Media, travelling incognito under the name of Artamenes, for Mandane, daughter of Cyaxares, his uncle, and the rivalry of the Kings of Pontus and Assyria for her hand, resulting in sieges, abductions, pursuits, incredible adventures, and the final union of hero and heroine. Under the guise of fantastic adventure Mme de Scudèry recorded both in the *Grand Cyrus* and in *Clèlie* (1656—1660) the events of her own time.

England surrendered to these intimate romances of delicate passion. Mrs. Pepys sat up all night reading the *Grand Cyrus* and bored her husband by telling long stories out of it. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu left the treasured works of D'Urfè, La Calprenède and Scudèry in her will. Apart from the constant reprints of earlier works there was little to set beside the French masterpieces. Native fiction languished for the time and only Boyle's *Parthenissa* (1654) and Ingelo's *Bentivolgio and Urania* (1660) deserve mention, the latter since it may have influenced Bunyan.

An event of great literary significance for the development of fiction was the publication of Mme de la Fayette's *Princesse de Clèves* (1678). It initiated a new era in the history of the romance, and may be regarded as one of the first examples of the novel properly so-called. In construction it was revolutionary. It was short, the form disciplined and compact, the unity of the plot unbroken by subordinate narratives. Although the scene was set in the times of Henri II the manners are contemporary. A brief outline of the story will show how far fiction had moved from the world of fantasy to the point when it could express the tragedy of the human heart and married love. The Princess of Clèves finds that she returns the love which Monsieur de Nemours lays at her feet. Shestru ggles with her passion but can neither overcome it nor ignore it ; to yield to it her virtue forbids. At length she confesses it to her husband, who adores her and begs him to let her retire from the Court. He lets her go, but the sacrifice kills him, for he falls into a fever from which he has neither the will nor the wish to recover. His death sets the Princess free but she cannot enjoy her life with de Nemours, and parts from him for ever. With this finely told story the art of fiction seems suddenly to have grown up.

In the same year that the *Princesse de Clèvs* was published, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* appeared—an interesting commentary on the difference between the French and English spirit in the seventeenth century. It is with Bunyan that genius first flashes into English fiction. Like William Blake, he has neither antecedents nor posterity. He lies outside the range of normal literary development, and yet, like Blake, Bunyan is intensely English and a vehicle of the English tradition. A passionate visionary, his burning message destroyed all less worthy interests.

Born at Elstow in 1628, Bunyan was the son of a tinker; he served in the Civil War, married, and followed his father's trade. After a dramatic conversion to the spiritual life he became a Baptist preacher in 1656. .During the Restoration he was imprisoned under the Conventicle Act for unlicensed preaching and spent twelve years in Bedford Gaol. It was during another spell of imprisonment in 1675 that he began his masterpiece, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan died in 1688.

In order to understand the strange incubation of Bunyan's

genius it is necessary to study him in relation to his times. His outwardly confined life is then seen as an allegory of lost hope and spiritual redemption. The triumph of Protestantism had resulted in the shifting of the burden of conscience from the Church to the individual. No pompous hierarchy protected man and prescribed in detail, sanctified by the tradition of centuries, the path to salvation. No longer could good works, gifts to charity, lavish endowments, renunciation of the world, or any of the thousand forms of temporary selflessness, avail. Instead there was a naked relationship between the soul and God: only in personal faith was salvation to be found; only the doctrine of Grace softened the harsh creed of Election. Bunyan's generation underwent a profound spiritual experience. It felt to the full the heavy burden that each man must bear alone. The conception of Hell, horrible enough in the Middle Ages, took an added terror from the Puritan conviction that only the elect could escape damnation. The Elizabethans had still felt spiritually bound to the old world order even when they claimed intellectual freedom from the limitations of medieval cosmology. But by 1640 the revolution in consciousness was complete; the soul of a people, finally emancipated from dependence upon form and ceremony, the symbols of protective restraint, was left with a pitiless burden —the burden of conscience.

This trauma of the religious consciousness was paralleled by an equally profound and significant experience on the economic plane. It is clear from contemporary records that the Puritan revolution nourished all kinds of hopes that were subsequently frustrated. Men read into this new struggle against royal tyranny the belief that they would get back their birthright—freedom, and enjoy complete equality once they had destroyed the hated King and his ministering bishops. The emotional hatred of inequality prompted the many apparently senseless acts of vandalism committed all over England at the time. The people who broke into churches, smashed the rails that enclosed the communion table and dragged it into the middle of the church, who tore the surplices of ministers, were impelled to do these things by the desire to make manifest the emotion of an equal brotherhood before Christ. They wanted to remove from worship anything that savoured of hierarchy, of special initiation; whatever, in short, recalled the odium attached to the *profanum vulgus.*

Great hopes were entertained by many of Cromwell's supporters of a wholesale redistribution of land. Socialist and even communist theories were widely held. Gerard Winstanley among others saw in private property and the inequalities it engendered the source of all the evils from which the people suffered. But when Winstanley's Diggers tried to put into practice their ideal communism on St. George's Hill they were promptly crushed. Many of the soldiers in the Independent Army believed they were fighting to put an end to the private ownership of land, and finding that the agrarian revolution was not halted, but even aggravated, after the Civil War, their mood became one of cynical despair. The wave of revolution had swept threateningly high, but when it broke and the long agony of civil strife was over, little was changed except outward forms.

Cromwell's realism taught him that England needed capital, industry and enterprise far more than premature schemes of socialism. The Civil War had been fought to determine whether the King was to maintain a static order of society or whether the dynamic of enterprise was to have complete freedom. The struggle had been decided in favour of economic freedom, but only for the merchant capitalists who had gained by force the right to expand.

Among the common people voices everywhere proclaimed the bitter hopeless disappointment men felt at the limitation and foundering of their hopes. These were the voices Bunyan heard as he passed from adolescence to maturity; they gave him a sense of "large issues, grave questions, valiant arguments." They struck a chord, too, in something deeper than his personal experience. For Bunyan's own family traced its ancestry back to the time of Richard Coeur de Lion and their yeoman prosperity had been swallowed up in the Dissolution of the monasteries; they too had lost their inheritance.

It is against this profound upheaval of the national consciousness that Bunyan's genius must be studied. He came to maturity in an England quickened by the blood guilt of regicides, inspired by Utopianism and excited by the spiritual ecstasies of an army of mental flagellants. He, too, experienced the loss of hope and came to regard the new order of society as one in which unrighteousness prospered, and virtue and poverty were too often allied. Political activity had proved a snare and a delusion: the eternal inheritance

symbolized by the possession of land became treasure laid up in heaven ; the more desired for being denied on earth.

In *Grace Abounding* (1666) Bunyan gave to his flock the story of his own conversion told with a compelling simplicity and sincerity.

> I could have enlarged much in this my discourse, of my temptations and troubles for sin ; as also of the merciful kindness and working of God with my soul. I could also have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do, but I dare not. God did not play in convicing of me the devil did not play in tempting of me, neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me; wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was.

As a child Bunyan had been affected by strong fears of hell, and his visions were those of a mind darkened by the more mystical and apocalyptic aspects of the Bible. Nowhere before had moral anguish been so powerfully and objectively portrayed as in *Grace Abounding*. Bunyan traced his career through a turbulent and evil youth devoted to swearing ("from a child I had but few equals, especially considering my years, which were tender, being few, both for cursing, swering, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God"), shooting, playing pagan games, dancing, bell-ringing and devilry of all kinds. He hears voices, sees visions, was providentially saved from death and gradually extricated himself from the viciousness of his life. This was not accomplished easily or without constantly falling back into wickedness. The sense of salvation came slowly to him and agonizing conflicts that brought him to the verge of utter despair preceded the final vouchsafing of Grace.

This autobiography, a fascinating record of introspective absorption in the problem of sin and, incidentally, a new departure in psychological realism, gives the impression of having been written in a state of exaltation brought about by the triumphant victory of the regenerated soul. It is significant that Bunyan heard voices. Unaccustomed to learning, he had studied with love the Bible, its memorable phrases echoed in his blood and he was, moreover, living in an age when the

Bible was used as a kind of Sibylline Book. Men would open the Bible at random, having prepared their minds, and would interpret the first verse that came to light as having some bearing on the problems that beset them. To Bunyan the verses of the Bible were voices prophetic in their significance. Proceeding thus from the most common and most accessible sources of religion, his literary genius does not require to be explained.

Bunyan was the common man of the seventeenth century; not the philosophic follower of Descartes, but a man awakening to the sense of sin by an irrational act, since to believe that the voices he heard were valid required an act of faith. No intellectual conviction was needed, since he had experienced an inner intuitive certainty that made argument unnecessary.

Twelve years later Bunyan published *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). This work is the dramatization of the inner experience of *Grace Abounding*, and in following the heroes of Bunyan through the many vicissitudes of their journey towards the dream of their hearts it is possible to understand the attraction that lies in this symbolically deep tale, and how it has held millions of readers to whom it has presented the very picture of the most essential existence.

The Pilgrim's Progress embodied in concrete and vivid terms the austere doctrine of a jealous God, the path strewn with pitfalls that we all must tread ; the fewness of the chosen. The book is filled throughout with the sombre pathos of Puritan Christianity. Such a vision of life would have been impossible for Milton, who dissociated himself from lesser unregenerate mortals, but Bunyan's experience was nearer to that of the average sin-afflicted man. To such he represents the force of conscience working in a nature that warred against itself.

The story of how Christian leaves his doomed city at the bidding of Evangelist to seek by the Path of Righteousness the Celestial City is, or rather was, known to every child. There are superficial resemblances to the old tales of adventure. Christian is captured by Giant Despair, imprisoned in Doubting Castle, falls by the Slough of Despond and is forced to fight with the monster Apollyon. There are hints too of the Morality plays of the Middle Ages, since Christian is Everyman whose path is set through the snares and tribulations of

the world. A triumph of contemporary portraiture is achieved in the description of Vanity Fair, where materialism baits its enticing traps for the soul's destruction. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the Holy Grail of Puritanism.

It is besides the first book of clear-cut objectively defined imaginative story-telling. The abstractions are powerfully clothed. Literary sources for the book have been suggested. Bunyan may have read the religious allegories of Reynolds, and he was possibly familiar with De Guileville's *Le Pelerinage de l'homme*, a work which had remained popular since Lydgate translated it in the fifteenth century. But Bunyan's chief source of inspiration was the Bible. He showed everywhere to what an extent he had absorbed the Bible, although he transposed it into a more familiar key. His force springs from emotional conviction, and his language has the strength of personal feeling. His style, instinct with a moving though simple eloquence, admits no conscious embellishment of the theme, but he reveals effectively his power to tell a tale, to build up the incidents of drama in language that is racy and spirited although unsubtle and childishly pictorial. And yet it must be admitted that the sweep and lucidity and the sense of construction are unexpected in one of so little culture.

Bunyan belonged to the tradition which includes Langland's *Piers Plowman*, the Anglo-Saxon religious poems, the medieval moralities and homilies with their vivid over-simplification of moral issues. The personified vices and virtues, eternal testimony to man's simple metaphysic, were part of the inheritance of drama, passing from the Moralities of the Middle Ages through the Renascence Interludes. In all likelihood they survived in the provinces as part of the stock-in-trade of companies of strolling players and before his conversion Bunyan may have frequented their performances. For a man nourished on seventeenth-century Evangelism it was natural to see life as a pilgrimage beset with difficulties and snares, and so powerful was the sense of actuality Bunyan imparted to his allegory that attempts have been made in the twentieth century to give it a local habitation. The Delectable Mountains have been variously discovered in the Chiltern Hills and the Leith Hill range. Such exactitude is amusing but hardly important. The book remains the supreme expression of a spiritual quest inspired by a burning vision of man's earthly destiny.

The success of *The Pilgrim's Progress* led Bunyan to write a companion piece in the form of a dialogue, full of moral exhortation, entitled *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680). It purports to be the biography of a selfish, brutal, dishonest tradesman, one of the damned who from infancy had been a byword for profligacy and blackguardism. Mr. Wiseman, who was at the deathbed of his evil neighbour, meets the perfect listener—Attentive—and prompted by the spectacle of human wickedness typified by the execrable Badman, related his history.

> For that wickedness, like a flood is like to drown the English world. It beings already to be above the tops of the mountains; it has almost swallowed up all; our youth, middle age, old age, all, are almost carried away by this flood.

The device of dialogue is rather clumsy and the artistic integrity is spoiled by the interpolated moralizings of Mr. Wiseman. Yet the story is a masterly piece of realism and Mr. Badman's artfully contrived bankruptcy—surely the first example in literature—is described with bitter disapproval.

Bunyan continued to preach and write for the rest of his life. In 1682 he published *The Holy War*, and in 1684 the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which Christiana and her children follow Christian's example, and, helped by Mr. Greatheart, survive the perilous journey, *The Holy War* has a cosmic theme, the spiritual conflict between Emmanuel, the Prince, and Diabolus for the possession of Mansoul, a fair and delicate town, which Shaddai, the first builder, made for his own delight. The city is rescued and restored to its former liberty, but the Diabolans do not give up hope. They make another assault, gain allies within, are defeated a second time, but conspire with the malcontents. The struggle between good and evil is, Bunyan knew, eternal.

Bunyan certainly wrote no novels in the accepted sense, he left no school of imitators ; his experience was too individual for that, and perhaps too closely related to the spiritual torment of his own age, but his rare felicity or temperament enabled him to endow fiction with a new compelling seriousness. The prose style of these creative allegories is a fine instrument, capable of all effects from simplest incidents to those of extreme dramatic tension. His remains the most

eloquent voice among the people of the one generation of militant God-seekers English history has produced.

Bunyan stands out like a majestic rock from the sea of light literature that frothed around him. After their long exile the cavaliers came back with gay pageantry and tried to restore to the Court its former splendour. The theatre flourished again. Popular plays reflected the taste and morals of the Court circles, brilliant, witty, ingenious, and, if the drama is to be believed, life for a brief while was reduced to mathematical equations of intrigue. From these scintillating indictments of infidelity and unchastity the greater part of the public stayed away, solacing itself with sermons, romances, and the many forms of fiction both light and ser ous that were now available.

Women writers now appear for the first time in English letters. Chief among them was Mrs. Aphra Behn, who, according to her own account, had a romantic childhood in Surinam, then an English possession, and returned to England in 1658 when the colony was handed over to the Dutch. She married a London merchant of Dutch extraction. Her wit and abilities brought her into high esteem, and after her husband's death in 1666 she was employed on secret service in the Netherlands during the Dutch war.

Her lively, prolific pen was soon engaged in writing comedies. A woman of generous temper, armorous disposition and unbounded enthusiasms, Aphra Behn was essentially a child of her time. Yet to her mediocre talent prose fiction is curiously indebted, for she made use of incidents of real life in the service of fiction at a time when allegories and heroic romances were still at the height of their vogue. She shared in the attempt, already noted in France, to bring romance into close relation with contemporary life.

Her earliest work of fiction was the *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*, published in 1683—an eerly example of the story told in the form of letters. It purports to be letters exchanged between a young French nobleman in the time of the Huguenot rebellion in Paris and his wife's sister, who elopes with him. Under this light disguise Mrs. Behn gratified popular taste by exploiting a famous contemporary scandal involving Lord Grey and his sister-in-law, Lady Berkeley. The letters were eagerly read as an intimate version of the affair. What is new in the letters is the strain of voluptuous passion,

although this may have been in part derived from the celebrated *Five Love Letters from Nun to a Cavalier*: translated by Roger L'Estrange (1678). Whatever the source, the note of authentic passion is at last sounded in English fiction.

Among her many essays in fiction the best are *The Fair Jilt*, *Agnes de Castro* and *Oroonoko*. The latter, published posthumously in 1698, is, allegory excluded, the most notable novel of the century. It retained many of the faults of the heroic type, but Mrs. Behn told her story vigorously, with evident sincerity, and declared that it was founded on facts, of many of which she was an eye-witness during her stay in Dutch Guiana. This assertion is disputed by modern critics, who believe that Mrs. Behn, like Defoe, used contemporary histories with some skill. She could certainly have derived much of the material from George Warren's *Impartial Description of Surinam*.

The plot of *Oroonoko* is the familiar one of lovers torn asunder by adversity and unexpectedly united. It differed from the common run of such stories in that the hero was a Negro and the end was tragic.

The hero, Oroonoko, is the Prince of Coromantien, grandson and heir of the aged king. In every respect he is the archetype of the noble savage of Rousseau—magnanimous, open, loyal. He falls in love with Imoinda, the lovely daughter of his headman, but, unhappily for the lovers, Oroonoko's followers extol her beauty too lavishly and the old King carries her off for his harem. She incurs his displeasure by receiving a visit from the Prince and is sold into slavery. The Prince flees to the army, but is treacherously decoyed aboard a slave ship and taken to Surinam, whither Imoinda has preceded him. Here the lovers meet and, winning the sympathy of a kindly Cornish overseer, Trefry, are allowed to marry. The two Africans are promised their freedom when the Lord Governor returns, but his arrival is so long delayed that Oroonoko becomes impatient. Beside himself with anger that his child will be born into slavery, he urges his fellow slaves to follow him into the wilderness and freedom.

> Why should we be slaves to these white men? Have they conquered us nobly in battle? Are we become their captives by the chance of war? No! We have been bought and sold like monkeys or cattle, to a set of cowards and rogues who

> have been driven out of their own country by reason of their villainy. Shall we let vile creatures such as these flog and bruise us as they please ?

Oroonoko leads the slaves and their wives and children out of the camp. But after two days the militiamen sent to fetch them back overtake them and a battle ensues. The Prince surrenders at last, on a promise from the Lord Governor that he will be given free passage for his wife and child to Coromantien. Believing the white man's word, he goes back, but instead of freedom he is publicly lashed and thrown into prison. From this condition he is rescued by Trefry, but shame and torture have unhinged his mind. He kills Imoinda to save her from dishonour and himself dies horribly at the hands of the cruel militiamen.

The story is a fine testimony to Mrs. Behn's generous sentiments that were far in advance of her time, and the work is an interesting anticipation of eighteenth-century theories. In every way the noble savage presents a striking contrast to cunning treachery and dishonour of the white man. He possesses the integrity of instinct before it has been corrupted by society.

Mrs. Behn's incurably romantic nature unfitted her to further the advance of prose fiction towards greater realism, but that she recognized the growing demand of the time is shown by her insistence on the true nature of her facts, by the use of familiar names and places, and her skill in contriving many deft touches to make her narrative appear genuine. It is clear that the distinctive quality of the novel, its apparent verisimilitude, is, at last, being appreciated. Congreve in his preface to the mock-romantic *Incognita* declares:

> Novels are of a more familiar nature ; Come near us and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events but not such as are wholly unusual or unprecedented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring pleasure nearer us. Romances give more Wonder, Novels more Delight.

A host of women writers, Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Howard, Mrs. Barker, and Mrs. Rowe, followed the lead of Mrs. Behn and busied themselves creating a widening circle of readers. For the most part their writings are sentimental pseudo-historical

fiction, generally not much above the level of scandalmongering. A strong political bias is shown in Mrs. Manley's *Secret History of Queen Zara and the Zarasians* (1705), a miscellany of anecdote and scurrilous imputation on Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. More famous was the same writer's *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality of both sexes from the New Atalantis, an island in the mediterranean* (1707). While all the time protesting that her characters were fictitious, Mrs. Manley continued to attack the private morals of the Whig nobility, and in particular to discredit the Duke of Marlborough. Enjoyment of her work depended on the identification of the real personages who masqueraded under the fictitious names. Other works of Mrs. Manley include *A Stagecoach Journey to Exeter* (1696), story told in letters; at each halting-place for the night letters are dispatched by the passionate pilgrims, all with stories to relate. In *Rivella* (1714), Mrs. Manley told the story of her own life.

Eliza Hayward, another indefatigable woman writer of the period, catered for the popular taste in scandalous histories in her *Memoirs of a Certain Island adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725), and in her *Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the Court of Caramania* (1727). She subsequently produced to lively novels after the genre had received its *cachet* at the hands of Richardson, namely *The History of Betty Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jeremy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753).

Although the scandalous chronicles were of little or no literary value, they showed fiction creeping nearer to actual life, and even Swift availed himself of their possibilities for piquant exposure in his famous satire which pilloried Walpole. In the hands of those women writers the emphasis was always on the theme of personal love, while in obedience to the prevailing taste the conflict between love and duty was sentimentally exploited. It was obvious from the way in which the secret memoirs took the place of the old romances that the reading public wanted their fiction to take at least the form of fact. But the art of conveying the illusion of life was not to be found among the women writers of this period. They may recognize the target but they invariably miss it and rarely get further than titillating the appetite for scandal.

Daniel Defoe's was the genius for verisimilitude that finally turned fiction writers towards naturalism. After him the

portrayal of real life and the accurate observation of nature was assured. With Defoe the power to surround fictitious situations with all the circumstances of actuality was discovered, and, apparently, by chance.

The son of a Nonconformist and intended for the ministry Defoe (1659-1731) had an adventurous career. By turns he was pamphleteer, author and journalist; going bankrupt as a hosier, he recovered his fortune as a manufacturer of bricks and pantiles. He became a political agent employed on secret missions by the Government, wrote satirical doggerel verse, turned biographer, economist and editor of newspapers. His energies were prodigious and untiring. The handful of novels by which he is chiefly remembered today came late in his career and appeared as by-products, as it were.

He is said to have created every known branch of journalism, spoke five languages, read a sixth, described himself as a master of astronomy, geography and history. Everything human was of interest to him; he interviewed criminals on their way to Tyburn, and on one occasion published from his cell in Newgate a minute account of the great storm of 1703 within a few days of its occurrence. Always first in the field with circumstantial obituary biography, whether of the celebrated or the infamous, all was literary grist that came to Defoe's mill. At the time he wrote *Robinson Crusoe* he was fifty-nine years of age, and was busy editing several journals besides lending his pen to the Government in its efforts to combat Jacobite activities.

Even in the Age of Reason Defoe did not despise a good ghost story and the *Relation of the Apparition of Mrs. Veal to her friend Mrs. Bargrave* was a masterpiece of journalistic investigation and reporting. It showed the same power of creating detail and building up stroke by stroke a convincing piece of circumstantial evidence that was to make *Robinson Crusoe* a landmark in fiction.

This story that has delighted the young, and the old for that matter, for over two hundred years was actually based on an experience in the life of a seaman. Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years on the deserted island of Juan Fernandez. But Selkirk's four years become thirty in Defoe's hands and the story itself is turned into a microcosm of the eighteenth century's triumph over nature. During the thirty years of his stay on the island Crusoe establishes himself very comfortably,

converts his native servant Friday to Christianity, overcomes the savages and is hailed as their master. By the happy device of allowing Crusoe to rescue ammunition and material from his wrecked ship before the storm finally destroys it, Defoe is able to invest every moment of life on the island with interest. Any withholding of belief was impossible when the reader was confronted with the thousand details of Crusoe's everyday activities—making a sieve, milking goats, preparing his food, and fortifying his home. Nothing was omitted that might delight the new reading public, eager for facts, enchanted by documentary records and demanding the illusion of truth.

In the eyes of the practical middle class for whom Defoe wrote, Robinson Crusoe was the epitome of their virtues. He was immensely practical, resourceful, pious and utterly devoid of imagination—in the whole of his stay on the island he never once remarked on the beauty of nature or rhapsodized over a sunset. The prosaic realism that would have discredited him with a romantic age was a recommendation to his own. And, too, his unreflective utilitarianism was congenial to a generation that eschewed introspection and sought in external activity relief from melancholy. A new public with different tastes required new canons of fiction.

The success of *Robinson Crusoe*—it was translated into many languages and inspired many imitations—led Defoe to develop the market for this kind of fiction. It is possible that he may have had literary sources for his masterpiece; he was a great leader of travel books and knew Dampier's *New Voyage round the World*, but his photographic memory of which he boosted that as a child he never forgot anything they told him and his extraordinary powers of rapid assimilation were the catalysts of his peculiar genius. A second part—*The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*—was added in 1719. In this, with Friday, Crusoe revisits his island, is attacked by a fleet of canoes on his departure and loses Friday in the encounter. *The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe*, with his vision of the *Angelick World*, appeared in 1720. In the same year Defoe wrote *Captain Singleton*, the story of a boy stolen by gypsies who takes to a career of piracy. So realistic are the descriptions that in the record of a journey across Central Africa Defoe seems to have followed his hero's adventures map in hand.

His next work, *Moll Flanders,* published in 1721, added a love interest, but much of it so improbable that Moll would, in fact, have needed ten lives to have gone through so many adventures. Although the story is picaresque in form it has not the customary insouciant moral abandon, since the heroine perpetually laments the wickedness that cruelty of circumstances forces her to commit. *Moll Flanders* has never lost its popularity with a wide section of the reading public.

Moll, who hides her real identity behind a pseudonym, is an attractive creature in spite of her criminal records, for she is generous, impulsive and so obviously the victim of fate. She acquires husbands at an alarming rate and discards children with automatic case and packs enough experiences in her life to maintain at least ten modern novels.

The steps by which she is led to commit her first crime and so to start the career which brings her almost to the gallows are brilliantly observed. Here Defoe describes the first temptation :

> Wandering thus about, I knew not whither, I passed by an apothecary's shop in Leadenhall Street, where I saw lie on a stool just before the counter a little bundle wrapped in a white cloth; beyond it stood a maid-servant with her back to it, looking up towards the top of the shop, where the apothecary's apprentice, as I suppose, was standing upon the counter, with his back to the door, and a candle in his hand, looking and reaching up to the upper shelf, for something he wanted, so that both were engaged, and nobody else in the shop.
>
> This was the bait; and the devil who laid the snare prompted me, as if he had spoke, for I remember, and shall never forget it, 'twas like a voice spoken over my shoulder, "Take the bundle; be quick: do it this mement." It was no sooner said but I stepped into the shop, and with my back to the wench, as if I had stood up for a cart that was going by, I put my hand behind me and took the bundle, and went off with it, the maid or fellow not perceiving me, or any one else.
>
> It is impossible to express the horror of my soul all the while I did it. When I went away I had no heart to run, or scarce to mend my pace. I crossed the street indeed, and went down the first turning I came to, and I think it was a street that went through into Fenchurch Street; from thence I crossed and turned through so many ways and turnings that I could never teli which way it was, nor where I went; I felt not the ground I stepped on, and the farther I was

out of danger, the faster I went, till, tired and out of breath I was forced to set down on a little bench at a door, and then I found I was got into Thames Street, near Billingsgate. I rested me a little and went on ; my blood was all in a fire ; my heart beat as if I was in a sudden fright. In short, I was under such a surprise that I knew not whither I was agoing, or what to do.

Familiarity soon hardens Moll to the life of theft and even worse temptations assail her. There is psychological realism in the episode in which Moll is nearly driven by fear to murder :

> I went out now by daylight, and wandered about I knew not whither, and in search of I knew not what, when the devil put a snare in my way of a dreadful nature indeed, and such a one as I have never had before or since. Going through Aldersgate Street, there was a pretty little child had been at a dancing-school and was agoing home all alone : and my prompter, like a true devil, set me upon this innocent creature. I talked to it, and it prattled to me again, and I took it by the hand and led it along till I came to a paved alley that goes into Bartholomew Close, and I led it in there. The child said that was not its way home. I said, "Yes, my dear it is : I'll show you the way home." The child had a little necklace on of gold beads, and I had my eyes upon that and in the dark alley I stooped, pretending to mend the child's clog that was loose, and took off her necklace and the child never felt it, and so led the child on again. Here, I say, the devil put me upon killing the child in the dark alley, that it might not cry, but the very thought frighted me so that I was ready to drop down ; but I turned the child about and bade it go back for that was not its way home ; the child said she would. . . .

After many misadventures and at the age of seventy, having made good in America whither she had been deported, Moll returns to England with her husband, "where we resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have led."

The next year, 1722, Defoe produced *The Journal of the Plague Year*, an essay in fictitious history in which he handles with eclectic freedom a mass of material based on documents and recollections. It relates the public measures taken by the authorities, such as sequestration of the sick, the closing of infected houses, and the prohibition of assemblies. The symptoms of the disease, the gruesome circulation of the

dead-carts, the mass burials in great pits and the lamentable scenes witnessed by the supposed narrator are described with extraordinary vividness. Pity is avoided but the grim matter-of-fact tone and dry precision with which details are enumerated heightens the sense of horror. Sir Walter Scott maintained that if Defoe had not been the author of *Robinson Crusoe* he would have deserved immortality for the genius displayed in this work.

A similar technique of unsentimental documentation is to be noted in his fictitious autobiography of a celebrated courtesan, *Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress*, published in 1724, Roxana, an adventuress, flies higher than Moll Flanders, and after gaining a fortune by disreputable means queens it over London society (for seven years in her house in Pall Mall. An exciting emotional tension pervades the book from the dramatic incidents that culminate in Roxana's betrayal by the daughter she neglected in infancy. A current of middle-class prejudice is carefully directed against Roxana, whose vices have helped to raise her too far above her own station. The story ends somewhat abruptly and in confusion, but not before Roxana has suffered a reversal of fortune, is imprisoned for debt and dies in a state of penitence.

Colonel Jack (1722) presents a vivid picture of London life in the eighteenth century drawn with masculine vigour and exuberance. Jack, a tractable enough dog, had anybody been willing to teach him, is the illegitimate offspring of vagabonds who initiate him into the vicious life of London's underworld. Defoe's descriptive realism grips the imagination in the account of the homeless boys sleeping at night in the warm ashes of Dalton's glass-house in Rosemary Lane. One episode in the book deservedly moved Charles Lamb to rhapsodies of delight. Jack has stolen a well-filled wallet, and, fearing it will be taken from him by the other boys, goes out into the fields of Bethnal Green and puts it for safety in a tree, but the tree is hollow and the precious treasure falls through. Jack's anguish at the sudden eclipse of his fortune and his mad joy on discovering by accident that there is a hole at the bottom of the tree through which he can recover the wallet are unforgettably portrayed.

Defoe was the mouthpiece of the new class of readers who belonged to trade and commerce. His religious instincts were sound, but he took good care to salt his moralizings with

plenty of entertaining matter, and he never allowed the moral to spoil the story. At last the lower-middle class and the humble orders saw their lives and circumstances, their interests and enthusiasms, represented in literature with sympathy and seriousness. These readers were immensely concerned with the details of daily life, anxious to read about themselves, but resentful of ideals that had no practical outcome and with a Nonconformist contempt tor fantasy. There is no denying that the lack of imagination displayed by a class that was to become increasingly important during the great century of novel-writing—the eighteenth—stunted and limited the scope of fiction. His readers would swallow the grossest fictions, but only when they were presented as facts. This was Defoe's public and he seized on its salient desires and cleverly exploited them.

His own imagination was fired by facts, and his prose style, the product of journalism and propaganda, was the perfect medium for the prosaic realism of his material. A style simple, racy and unadorned, it was even devoid of the allusiveness and wealth of classical references that are typical of the period. It never occurred to Defoe to consider novel-writing as an art ; his intrinsic genius saw what had to be done with fiction and he did it. He riveted it firmly to the earth, and from now on through the great age of Richardson, Fielding and Smollett the novel will deal with the lives ordinary people lead as they endeavour to learn the lesson Crusoe had to teach ; "the invincible patience, indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances." This is the formula for what might be called the Nonconformist age of English fiction. The old struggle between vice and virtue was still raging, but no longer on an abstract, imaginary plane. The vices were now subtly embodied in worldly temptations while the virtues that resisted them were precariously in the alloy of character.

Dofeo's chief weakness lay in the lack of any selective principle. He piled incident on incident and the story raced helter-shelter across lives and continents. What restraint there was lies in the telling of the story but no concern was shown for form or pattern and no attempt was made to choose the significant episodes that in their crises reveal human destiny.

The greater genius of Jonathan Swift followed Defoe into the realm of story-telling, but the very qualities that made

Swift great precluded him from helping to develop the novel. His attitude to human weakness was one of merciless contempt. The fabric of life disintegrated under his corrosive iron. Possessing a moral and rational sensitivity to harmony, sweetness and light, rejoicing in integrity. Swift was forced into a harsh awareness of political jobbery, moral squalor, dishonesty and exploitation By Swift's time the spiritual experience of Bunyan's generation had been absorbed and reduced to normality; sin was no longer a morbid personal obsession and religion was confined within the comfortable limits of conventional piety. Vanity Pair was accepted with prosaic worldliness as the best habitation for men. The struggle that was to inaugurate the reign of the saints on earth had ended by restoring Charles the Second.

Swift's logic, as inescapable as the perfect accentuation of his prose, was used with deadly effect to demonstrate his gust with man in *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*.[1] For the framework of his satire he adopted a device, popular since the days of Lucian, of the imaginary journey, and his rather colourless hero, Lemuel Gulliver, has the necessary qualifications, being luckless and indefatigable. The voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag are masterpieces of political satire disguised as factual fantasy ; the follies of learning and science are brilliantly mocked in the voyage to Laputa and the whole state of man himself is shatterred in the pitiless vision of the land of the Houyhnhnms.

All Defoe's tricks for achieving verisimilitude were used by Swift with incomparably more skill, with greater strength, and with the conspiousness of deliberate art. Some traces of the current scandalous histories can be seen in the attack on Sir Robert Walpole in the person of Flimnap. But throughout the book Swift's approach to life was sterilizing. What humanity seeks in the novel is not prophetic denunciation but the benign, reproving toleration that is bestowed by the comic spirit. A novelist must be able to live inside the skin of his characters, he must become them, but Swift was always detached from life by the severity with which he condemns its activities. The king of Brobdingnag encourages Gulliver to tell him about Europe :

[1]By Lemuel Gulliver (1726).

He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century: protesting it was only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments ; the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition could produce.

On another occasion, having heard the boasting panegyric pronounced by Gulliver on his native country, the king retorts:

> My little friend. . . . You have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness and vice, are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator. That laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding and eluding them. I observe among you, some lines of an institution, which in its original might have been tolerable ; but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by corruptions. It does not appear, from all you have said, how any one perfection is required towards the procurement of any one station among you ; much less that men are ennobled on account of their virtue, that priests are advanced for their piety or learning, soldiers for their conduct or valour, judges for their integrity. senators for the love of their country, or counselors for their wisdom. . . I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives, to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.

Seared and withered by such nihilism the human comedy soon perishes.

Swift added little to the development of the novel, but he created a flawless prose and he showed how the power of irony could be employed in fiction to raze whole citadels of folly. Less impassioned later moralists like Peacock, Disraeli and Aldous Huxley were much indebted to Swift's ironic fantasy when the time came to use the novel as a vehicle for social, political and intellectual satire.

By the fourth decade of the eighteenth century all the divers elements of the novel were to hand—truth to fact, a credible psychology, seriousness of purpose, artistic restraint and a language natural and adaptable to the myriad moods that the novelist must present. The separate elements awaited the final synthesis.

CHAPTER 3

The Broad Highway

AFTER MANY FALSE STARTS, the novel took mature form as a distinct literary genre, though not as an art form, in three eighteenth-century masters, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett. Their work covered the twenty years between the sensational success of Richardson's first novel, *Pamela*, in 1740, and the death of Smollett in 1760, and their importance lies largely in the fact that they were aware of creating a new literary genre—what Fielding called "the comic prose epic." The novel took the imprint of the age in which it came to maturity, and the simply told story of everyday life, drawing for its plot on feeling and morality was welcomed by the large middle-class reading public, interested in itself, but taught by puritanism to mistrust the theatre. Moreover Richardson wrote with a distinctly moral purpose in view and the tendency to praise or condemn characters on purely ethical grounds became part of the tradition of the English novel. For a very long time to come aesthetic considerations and psychological realism were subordinated to a concern for morality.

As often before in the history of the novel, major developments, both in form and content, were the work of men and women not of outstanding literary eminence. This was true of Samuel Richardson, the diffident, vain but subtle printer who gave us the first masterpiece in the new genre. The course of Richardson's uneventful career can be followed from a sketch he sent to a Dutch admirer after he became famous. Born in Derbyshire in 1689, the son of a joiner, he showed such marked gravity of temperament as a child as to suggest the study of divinity. But his father could not afford to educate him for the Church. He left school at sixteen and, according to his own account, improved his mind by correspondence with "a gentleman greatly my superior in degree and ample fortune, who, had he lived, intended great things for me." This mysterious patron, whose identity has not been established, was prevented from carrying out his intentions, and Richardson was apprenticed to a printer, for whom he worked diligently and conducted himself for all the world like Hogarth's ideal apprentice. He behaved with such commendable frugality

that he even bought for himself the candle he used in his lucubrations.

A tendency to moral didacticism discovered itself early in his career.

> I was not yet eleven years old, when I wrote spontaneously a letter to a widow, of near fifty who, pretending to a zeal for religion was continually fomenting quarrels and disturbances, by backbiting and scandal, among all her acquaintances. Assuming the style and address of a person of years I exhorted her, I expostulated with her.

The handwriting was, however, recognized and the lady complained of the impertinence to Richardson's mother.

Already at the age of thirteen he was unconsciously collecting material. He became the confidant of three young women from a sewing circle who, unknown to each other, and

> having a high opinion of my taciturnity revealed to me their love secrets in order to induce me to give them copies to write after, or correct, for answer to their love letters. I have been directed to chide, even repulse, when an offence was taken or given, at the very time that the heart of the chider or repulser was open before me, overflowing with esteem and affection, and the fair repulser, dreading to bo taken at her word directing this word or that word, or that expression to be softened or changed.

It is clear that Richardson's extraordinary insight into the contradictory emotions of the female heart was gained from actual experiences and that these provided the psychological material for his *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

Professionally Richardson enjoyed all the success due to a virtuous apprentice. He married his master's daughter, succeeded to the business, was elected Master of the Stationers' Company. and had the privilege of printing the Journals of the House of Commons. But he created no stir in the outer world and there was nothing in his temperament to suggest or anticipate the success that burst upon him in 1740 when *Pamela* was published.

The idea of writing a novel developed out of a request from two bookseller friends, Charles Rivington and John Osborne, that he should draw up a volume of Familiar Letters.

It was to be a sort of manual for those whose education lagged behind their prosperity with *exempla* for all sorts of contingencies ; letters of condolence, of congratulation, of courtship and matrimony, letters from and to creditors. A special section was to consist of letters "to instruct handsome girls who are obliged to go out to service, as we phrase it, how to avoid the snares that might be laid against their virtue."

Today discussion of such problems, or rather their modern equivalent, is a common feature of newspapers and periodicals ; in those days it was provided in manuals of moral instruction. There was nothing especially new in this kind of writing. Puritan conduct books were an important feature of the time and many of the problems Richardson considered in his novels were common to all handbooks of ethics and devotion. They covered such topics as the marriage state, both from the religious and secular points of view ; marital relations between husband and wife ; government of the family ; and included questions of housekeeping and the upbringing of children. Two of the most famous of these manuals, *Of Domestical Duty* (1626) and *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658), were best sellers. The latter was translated into Welsh, Latin and French and went through a hundred and thirty-five editions between the date of publication and 1842.

In these conduct books certain moral attitudes were regarded as axiomatic. Thus the need for the wife to submit in all things to the judgment and authority of her husband was constantly stressed ; children must obey their parents, and to marry without the consent of parents was considered particularly heinous. "Children are so much the goods, the possession of their parents that they cannot without a kind of theft give themselves away themselves." These manuals were intended to be read aloud in the family circle for the edification of members, and their importance in creating a climate of ethical opinion cannot be ignored. Richardson, we know, was familiar with these manuals and although his own Familiar Letters were intended simply as examples in composing he thought there would be no harm in instructing his readers how they should "think and act in common cases as well as indite."

The story he afterwards used in *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* to illustrate the dangers that beset "handsome girls" was told him by some acquaintance of his youth of a Mr. B,

the owner of a great house, who married a beautiful and virtuous young girl, one of his mother's maids. After the mother's death, the young squire had tried by all manner of temptations to seduce the girl and she had recourse to as many innocent stratagems to save herself. Once she nearly drowned herself in despair. In the end, touched by her virtue and excellent qualities, the squire had made her his wife. Her behaviour in this state was so admirable in its humility and sweetness that she won the hearts of the squire's snobbish relations. With little modification this is the story Richardson incorporated into *Pamela*.

Richardson's skill, however, lay not in his plots, but in his manner of telling a story. Armed with his knowledge of the female heart and his professional experience in letter-writing, he chose to write his novel in the form of letters. This device, which keeps the reader's finger on the pulse of the story, gave to characters and events an intoxicatingly living quality which at once excited and captivated eighteenth-century readers.

Pamela, like her creator, is an eagerly active letter-writer: "I have got such a knack of writing, that when I am by myself, I cannot sit without a pen in my hand." In her first letter Pamela informs her parents of her good mistress's death, and of the kindness of her new master, the young squire. Her parents, Goodman and Mrs. Andrews, who are simple country folk, devoted to the true well-being of their pretty daughter, are worldly-wise enough to put her on her guard against him. By the seventh letter he has shown himself in his true colours, and their caution has been justified. The squire, finding Pamela proof against blandishments, bribes, threats and promises, tries to entrap her by tricks and boorishness. She is promised safe passage home to her parents, but this turns out to be a device to make her a prisoner in the squire's country house under the surveillance of his odious housekeeper, Mrs. Jewkes. Pamela gives way to despair, and, like her original, tries to drown herself. During her confinement, when she can no longer communicate with her parents, she records her experiences in a journal. This falls into the hands of the squire, whose sensibilities are touched by her piety, her courage and persistent virtue. He offers her marriage. With some subtlety, Richardson makes it quite clear that the squire has genuinely fallen in love, and there is no longer any question of seduction.

The little servant-girl had always accepted the social superiority of her tormentor. Now her heart, already half lost, goes over completely to the enemy. In her letters home she no longer calls him "this wretch," "this monster," "this vile creature"; he becomes instead her "dear good master," her "generous benefactor," her "worthy protector."

The marriage ceremony itself is a fine pericd piece. Pamela bobs and curtsies her way through it.

> God forgive me! but I never was so absent in my life, as at first : even till Mr. Williams had gone on his service, so far as to the awful words about "*requiring us, as we shall answer at the dreadful day of judgement*" ; and then the solemn words and my master's whispering "Mind this, my dear" made me start. Said he, still whispering, "Know *you* any impediment?" I blushed, and said, softly, "None, Sir, but my great unworthiness." Then followed the sweet words, *Will thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife,* &c. and I began to take heart a little, when my dearest master answers audibly to this question, "*I will.*" But I could only make a curtsey, when they asked me; though I am sure, my *heart* was readier than my speech, and answered to every article of *obey, serve, love and honour*. Mr. Peters gave me away, and I said after Mr. Williams, as well as I could, as my dear master did, with a much better grace, the words of betrothment ; and the ceremony of the ring passing next, I received the dear favour at his worthy hands, with a most grateful heart ; and he told me afterwards, that when he had done saying, *With this ring I thee wed*, &c. I curtsied, and said "Thank you, Sir." Maybe I did ; for it was a most grateful part of the service, and my heart was overwhelmed with his goodness, and the tender grace wherewith he performed it. I was very glad the next part was the prayer, and kneeling ; for I trembled so, I could hardly stand, betwixt fear and joy.

After the wedding Pamela's sweetness of temper and simple dignity overcome the mingled condescension and hostility of the squire's relatives and the novel ends in a blaze of goodwill.

For the first time in fiction a character had been created as distinct from a type, a symbol, or a figment of allegory. Pamela is so lifelike and natural that the reader, especially the feminine reader, is drawn by subtle sympathy into Pamela's world. There was no resisting the infinite credibility of it all.

When the book came out the shy printer who had suddenly produced a masterpiece found himself lionized by literary

London. And for the rest of his life Richardson continued to savour with delicate approval the incense that adoring women burnt before him. In conversation with these women and in the frequent interchange of letters he increased his already encyclopedic knowledge of the female heart. In the end he died, according to Dr. Johnson, "from mere want of variety among his flatterers."

However, dissentient voices were not lacking among the acclamations that greeted this new departure in fiction. Fraudulent sequels to the story were written which inflicted a mortal injury on Richardson's sensitive nature. An anonymous *Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* was thought—perhaps rightly—to be from the exasperated pen of Fielding, and the author of *Pamela* never forgave the insult.

Richardson had gone far beyond his original purpose of commending virtuous conduct to pretty servants. His Pamela was regarded as a real person and her creator laid himself open to attacks on her character. More than a touch of cant in the heroine's psychology had set masculine critics snarling and snorting. It was clear that Pamela's much-vaunted love of virtue sprang from no absolute passion. Rather it suggested cold calculation. And pert and entertaining as she was, her character lacked the poetry of goodness. Fielding denied her any virtue at all.

The second part of the book (published in 1741), which is less interesting and without drama, presents Pamela married, suffering with dignity and sweetness the burden of a profligate husband and finally reclaiming him.

In Richardson's next novel, *Clarissa*, two volumes of which were published in 1744 and five in 1748, a character of a totally different order is created. This is the longest of Richardson's works, comprising more than five hundred letters and possibly containing a million words. Richardson again used the letter form, holding that it was 'more affecting than the dry, narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted." The interest is psychological, the development of the theme so slow it has been rightly observed that "if you read Richardson for story you would hang yourself."

Much the same situation arises as in *Pamela*, but the heroine is of a different type; for Clarissa is romantic, not expedient. There are four chief correspondents: "two young

ladies of virtue and honour, bearing an inviolable friendship to each other, and writing not merely for amusement, but upon the most interesting subjects, and two gentlemen of free lives, one of them glorying in his talents and stratagems and invention, and communicating to the other in confidence all the secret purposes of an intriguing head, and resolute heart." The theme itself is full of pathos and offers far greater scope than *Pamela* for Richardson's profound and microscopic insight into the workings of emotion. Once the letter convention was accepted, and this was not difficult in a leisured age, it enabled the writer to give a convincing semblance of situations as these occurred to the correspondents. In addition it was possible for him to substitute intuition and inwardness for action – a process congenial to Richardson.

Clarissa Harlowe, a beautiful young heiress, is urged by her family to marry Roger, Solmes, a cold priggish suitor she detests. In her despair, when Solmes is installed and there is talk of jointures, settlements and terms, she turns for help to Richard Lovelace, an attractive, versatile but unscrupulous man of fashion who is also her suitor and more favoured by her but who has been rejected by her family. Lovelace abuses her trust and decoys her from the house after she has refused to elope with him without the protection of her friend and confidante, Miss Howe. Once Clarissa is in his power Lovelace resolves to revenge himself not only on her family but on her own innocent pride by seducing her. He takes her to London and installs her in a house of ill-repute kept by Mrs. Sinclair, a more sophisticated but equally odious version of Mrs. Jewkes. Clarissa's appeal to her family is answered only by a father's curse ; after which the story is told through the pen of Lovelace, who tells his friend Belford all the steps in his plots to ensnare her.

Throughout the long ordeal her spirit never wavers, but her health is broken by the treatment she receives. She escapes, but is brought back and becomes a prisoner in Lovelace's hands, completely helpless, since he has announced that she is his wife. He really loves her, and once his revenge is achieved, wishes to marry her, but he cannot move her inflexible will. His defence of moral sanctions has convinced her that no morality, gratitude, or humanity can be hoped for from him. She remains in the house, awing its evil inmates by the dignity and majestic innocence of her bearing. When

Lovelace offers her immediate marriage she quells him with, "It would be criminal to bind my soul in covenant to a man allied to perdition." For Clarissa as for Isabella, "stern and terrible puritan" in *Measure for Measure*, there can be no compromise with evil.

At length, during a temporary absence of Lovelace, she escapes and places herself under the protection of Belford, who realizes the wrong that has been done her and is anxious to make amends, vicariously. The last part of the story is filled with the protracted death scene over which England and Europe sobbed in chorus. The episode in which she orders her coffin to he placed in her room while she is yet alive, although ludicrous to modern readers, was powerfully affecting to Richardson's contemporaries. Over the deathbed played the unearthly radiance of Clarissa's personality, serene and resigned, as, lost to all terrestrial rewards, she composes her spirit for death and makes her peace with all those who have injured her.

> Her sweet voice and broken periods [writes Belford to Lovelace, describing the scene], methinks still fill my ears, and never will be out of my memory, "Do you, Sir," turning her head towards me, "tell your friend that I forgive him, and I pray God to forgive him. Let him know how happily I die, and that such as my own I wish to be his last hour."

Richardson had to fight hard to resist demands from his readers for a happy ending, but either artistic integrity prevailed, or more probably his solemn conviction that nothing could justify Clarissa's disobedience of her father's will. That the novel was intended as a warning is indicated by the title page concerning "*The distresses that may attend Misconduct both of Parents and Children in relation to Marriage.*" Richardson's moral purpose consequently held his artistic imagination in fee. The puritanism that was let loose in English literature in the seventeenth century stalks visibly through the pages and for many readers the moral issue creates an unnatural tension. Yet the hothouse atmosphere of "sensibility" suited an age that found in sentiment an obvious relief from its own inhuman callousness.

At the time, the character of Lovelace was much criticized. The ladies found him dangerously attractive and even the chaste Clarissa admitted "that men of his caste are the men

our sex do not naturally dislike." Men refused to believe in a villain who confided dis devilish schemes in advance to a friend. He might be credible ; they rather hoped he was not. Richardson himself in dealing with Lovelace allowed the artist to triumph over the moralist. Instead of a sinner's deathbed. Lovelace is allowed a dignified death, with Clarissa's name on his lips. The shallow libertine, however, still cannot see Clarissa's refusal as anything more than the "pretty little refusal" of "his little pretty blushing rogue."

Rightly considered, the tragedy of the book lies in the impact through passion of two conflicting attitudes to life. Lovelace belongs to the Restoration. His philosophy is the Hedonism of Rochester. His is the world of easy morals, of lightly held vows and his wit, charm, gallantry and intelligence are devoted wholly to amorous intrigue. Etherege's Dorimant, Congreve's Mirabel and Belmour and Farquhar's Archer and their ladies would have understood him. There could have been no tragedy where the same moral idiom was spoken. But the Caroline Saturnalia was over and the sterner values that Bunyan respected had come into their own. There could be no compromise with vice, and absolute purity could admit no dalliance. Lovelace and Clarissa could only destroy each other.

With *Clarissa* the long debt to France was repaid. The book was eagerly read abroad and the French thought they had at last found an adult English writer who eschewed buffoonery and was able to analyse the human heart. In England, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote, "this Richardson is a strange fellow. I heartily despise him and eagerly read him, nay, sob over his works in a most scandalous manner." Lord Chesterfield denied Richardson skill in depicting people of high society, but admitted that he never mistook nature. In latter times Coleridge called *Clarissa* "a great, still book," and Napoleon is said to have relaxed over it in his tent after the strain of battle.

Undoubtedly this is Richardson's finest work and one in which the intimate workings of the human heart are revealed in situations into which character and passion are subtly interwoven. It was not until Marcel Proust that another novelist showed the same deliberate interest in unravelling the complexities of the emotion of love and in laying bare the nerves and tissues, the very cells that compose a human

reaction. *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* reveals the continued inspiration of Richardson's subjective method.

Richardson's supremacy in fiction was unchallenged until the publication in 1749 of Fielding's masterpiece, *Tom Jones*. The hero, Tom, was a scamp—who quickly became too great a favourite with the ladies. What was more damnable, in Richardson's eyes, was that his easy ways seemed to threaten the moral values he had so earnestly been propagating.

This may explain the change of tone, and relative sprightliness, of *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), his next novel. Amends would be made to the men whose feelings had been outraged by Lovelace, and the ladies would have a hero worthy of their devotions. Although the liveliest and best constructed of the novels, *Sir Charles Grandison* is the one that least attracts the modern reader. The hero's path is too rose-strewn; his character is too completely integrated; he is never seriously threatened with temptation; in short, he is faultless.

Sir Charles Grandison possesses all the gifts of fortune. He is young, rich, well-born, perfect in figure, dress and deportment; and he is a consummate swordsman, who out of sheer kindness of heart refuses a duel. His entry into the novel is superbly arranged when, with a great flourish, he rescues Harriet Byron from a dissatisfied suitor, Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, who is trying to abduct her after a ball. She loses her heart to her rescuer, but although himself somewhat touched by her appeal he is committed in honour to a lovely and passionate Italian, Clementina della Porretta. The complications that arise from the incredible delicacy of all concerned account for the inordinate length of the novel. Sir Charles is whisked away to Italy and his absence is filled in with epistolary correspondence between all the chief characters in which the hero's personality is revealed. These human mirrors reflect every aspect to his advantage. At last Clementina, torn by the conflict between her love and her duty as a Catholic and an Italian, renounces her marriage with a Protestant Englishman. Her sacrifice costs her her reason but leaves Sir Charles free to marry Harriet.

Sir Charles Grandison fulfils the promise of Defoe's English gentleman. As a matter of fact what he represents is the upward push of the prosperous middle class and the meticulous insistence on good form by people who needed the

outward assurance of their standing in society. This somewhat artificial formality evoked Lord Chesterfield's criticism that Richardson failed with people of quality. Richardson lacked the easy natural prose of a Horace Walpole : his style in his last novel was, like his hero, somewhat stiff and formal. Even Richardson seemed to realize Sir Charles was a little lacking in humanity, since he permits another character to say of him :

> Do you think, my dear, that had he been the first man he would have been so complaisant to his Eve as Milton makes Adam? . . . No! it is my opinion that your brother would have had enough gallantry to his fallen spouse to have made him extremely regret her lapse ; but that he would have done his duty were it but for the sake of posterity and left it to the Almighty, if such had been his pleasure, to have annihilated his first Eve and given him another.

Still, it is hard not to be prejudiced in favour of a man who, in the eighteenth century, refuses to dock the tails of his horses.

As a novelist Richardson seems to have succeeded in spite of his intentions, which in the case of each of his books were didactic—hardly a likely source of inspiration for exciting fiction. But Richardson's philosophy was heartfelt. He typified the change that was affecting sensibility—the swing away from reason to feeling. Right action, said Richardson, was not the result of reason (as Swift would have it), nor of simple benevolence allied to commonsense, as Fielding held, but of right feeling. A delicate sensibility was cultivated by his favourite characters. A man of sentiment, like Grandison, was an object of veneration, for the type had not yet degenerated into the canting hypocrite of a Joseph Surface.

Without Richardson we might never have had the novels of his great contemporary and antagonist, Henry Fielding (1707-1754), who had an even more decisive contribution to make to the growth of the novel as we know it today.

By birth as well as intellectually there was a great gulf between the two men. Fielding came of a line said to be descended from the Counts of Hapsburg ; and his father was the grandson of the Earl of Desmond, and great-grandson of the first Earl of Denbigh.

Born near Glastonbury in 1707, Henry Fielding went to Eton and afterwards to Leyden, where he studied Civil Law.

Lack of means prevented his being called to the Bar, as it had withheld Richardson, the son of a Derbyshire joiner, from entering the Church. Anyway, his real love was for the theatre, for which he wrote parodies, satires, and topical extravaganzas. But his satires were too pointed and the shafts directed against Walpole's corrupt administration too well aimed. Nevertheless some eighteen plays were produced, all brilliantly successful, and Fielding became managing partner of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Then further attacks on Walpole led to the passing of the Licensing Act in 1737, despite Lord Chesterfield's protests, and four theatres, including the Little Theatre, were closed. Fielding's occupation was gone. He applied himself to the study of Law and went periodically on the Western Circuit, taking his legal duties very seriously and setting himself to remedy abuses. This experience deepened his already wide understanding of human nature and sharpened his ironic appreciation of the ups-and-downs of fortune.

His first novel was begun as a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*. In 1747 he published *Joseph Andrews*, the story of a supposed brother of Pamela, also a domestic servant, whose virtue is assailed by his widowed mistress, Lady Booby. Joseph has read his sister's letters and vowed to follow her example. Like her, he becomes the victim of a plot and is dismissed from service. The satiric purpose, however, is soon swallowed up in the broader scope of comedy. On the highway Joseph is robbed by thieves and left naked and bleeding in a ditch—a situation which gave Fielding ample opportunity to observe with irony the behaviour of the passengers of a coach which happens to pass the poor wretch. The only Christian feeling is shown by the postilion

> (a lad who hath since been transported for robbing a hen roost) who voluntarily stript off a great coat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by the passengers), that he would rather ride in his shirt all his life than suffer a fellow creature to lie in so miserable a condition.

Joseph would have fared ill but for the appearance on the scene of his old schoolmaster, Parson Abraham Adams. The interest now shifts from the handsome Joseph to the quixotic curate, whose shabby exterior hides one of the noblest hearts

in literature. Adams is a fine creation even in an age which specialized in characters. He owes much to Cervantes, an author Fielding loved, but even more to Fielding's observation and understanding of genuine Christianity at a period when fanaticism and indifference divided the kingdom unequally between them. Goodness, charity, learning and simple piety are compounded with an endearing naïvete in a man who believes good of everyone, is incapable of malice and is at all times a chivalrous defender of the weak. He can be fooled but never defeated.

The loosely constructed but complex plot moves after much entertaining incident to a complicated climax. Lady Booby tries to prevent the marriage of Joseph to his boyhood sweetheart Fanny Adams, and there is a sudden sinister discovery that they are really brother and sister. To cut the Gordian knot, Fielding calls in a familiar device from the old Byzantine romances. Joseph has a strawberry mark on his shoulder. It serves to reveal his true identity and he is restored to his father, from whom he had been stolen away by gypsies many years before. In the happy dénouement that follows, Parson Adams is not forgotten and, as an earthly reward for his simple Christianity, he acquires a living valued at £ 130 a year.

Here was something indisputably new in fiction, for never before had the reader been offered such a harvest of characters in one book. *Joseph Andrews* throbs with life. The characters, boldly and brilliantly observed, are drawn from all classes of society. There are effeminate fops, cheating lawyers and brutal squires. Amorous and unlovely waiting-women are presented with rare skill, and situations are neatly contrived to expose their foibles, their absurdities and their contradictions. In this novel, sparkling with wit and yet tender towards weakness, and profoundly tolerant of the mixture of good and bad in all of us, the author dropped the familiar pretence of presenting actual life in the guise of fiction. Fielding boldly declared that his story was fictitious and his characters invented. His construction betrayed the dramatist's hand and effects were obtained by situations and climaxes which gave scope for dialogue. There was no interest in psychological subtlety and all the characters (often contrasted in pairs as Adams and Trulliber, the good and bad parsons) are most healthily extrovert.

Feilding's next book, *Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743) was an essay in criminal biography, purporting to be the life of the notorious highwayman who had already attracted the pen of Defoe. It contains a veiled attack on Fielding's old enemy Walpole, and the manner of writing is savagely caustic. The thesis on which the book rests is that the qualities that made the great criminal can be shown to be identical with those that animate the Prime Minister; *i.e.* greatness without goodness is a curse to mankind.

In the three years between 1746 and 1749 Fielding was working on his masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones.* It is a great book in itself and a microcosm of the next hundred years in prose fiction. Today it is impossible to underrate it, but the literary coteries of the time looked on it coldly. They were devoted to Richardson's sensibility cult, and were unmoved by Fielding's harder brilliance and more masculine vigour.

Tom Jones may claim to be the first novel written to a theory. It was epical in structure, or rather an alternation of epic and dramatic, the narrative complicating itself so as to bring various conflicting interests and rival intrigues to a close encounter, and then, by means of a sudden disclosure, unravelling the complications. In other words, Tom has a series of involved adventures, which are shaped towards their climax by the hand of a dramatist. The rigid linking of cause and effect lies partly in the nature of comedy and is partly the direct result of Fielding's philosophy. Taking a point of vantage outside the story the author, inspired by the Comic Spirit, directs his analytical intelligence to the point where the planes of "Being" and "Seeming" intersect, and he reverberates with thunderous laughter at the contradictions and hypocrisies suddenly revealed. Behind all the chance encounters, incongruities and anomalies that make up the affairs of man is a scheme, a pattern, perhaps a little too artfully contrived, but due at all events to deliberation.

In contrast to the concentrated inwardness and brooding shadows of Richardson's *Clarissa* we are offered a panorama flooded with warm light, basking in the sun at noonday. *Tom Jones* is the eighteenth century before the mists of sentiment clouded its hard outlines and softened its stark conflicts. The reader is soon on familiar terms with a broad cross-section of society in the period immediately after the second Jacobite

Rebellion while the country was still convulsed by that romantic upheaval. Many references to this event are woven into the story: Partridge is a foolish Jacobite; troops are constantly on the move; the heroine, Sophia, fleeing from her father, is actually taken for Jenny Cameron, Prince Charlie's mistress.

The story falls naturally into three parts. The first, strangely reminiscent of the oldest stratum of romance fiction, begins with the mysterious discovery of an infant in Mr. Allworthy's bed after that gentleman has been away on business in London. This part presents life in the country, full-flavoured and rich in healthy animalism. The stage is dominated by hard-drinking, hard-swearing, fox-hunting squires, gamekeepers turned poacher, obsequious villagers and their much-seduced daughters, cantankerous pedagogues and censorious ladies of all classes. Tom's origin remains a mystery, but Mr. Allworthy takes pity on him and brings him up with his own nephew, young Blifil, an odious hypocrite who seeks to harm the generous and manly Tom. The boys are educated by Thwackum and Square, philosophical progenitors of so many eighteenth-century theory-mongers:

> . . . their tenets were indeed diametrically opposite to each other. Square held human nature to be the perfection of all virtue, and that vice was a deviation from our nature, in the same manner as deformity of body is. Thwackum, on the contrary, maintained that the human mind, since the Fall, was nothing but a sink of iniquity, till purified and redeemed by grace. In one point only they agreed, which was in all their discourses on morality, never to mention the word goodness. The favourite phrase of the former, was the natural beauty of virtue; that of the latter, was the divine power of grace. The former measured all actions by the unalterable rule of right, and the eternal fitness of things; the latter decided all matters by authority; but in doing this, he always used the Scriptures and their commentators, as the lawyer doth his Coke upon Lyttleton, where the comment is equal authority with the text.

Tom falls in love with the companion of his childhood, the beautiful Sophia Western, daughter of a neighbouring squire, but the romance that began so lyrically ends with a reversal of fortune for the hero. Betrayed by the unscrupulous

and jealous Blifil, Jones is turned away by Mr. Allworthy and takes to the road, penniless and rejected.

The second part of the story records the swift dramatic succession of adventures on the road, in which the various threads of the narrative become inextricably entangled and a host of new characters are encountered, each of whom contributes the story of his experiences. There are many digressions and the author intrudes at intervals to harangue the reader on some point of philosophy or construction.

The third and last part is set in London, where Tom established himself—thanks to his good looks, gallantry and charm —under the protection of Lady Bellaston, and whither Sophia flees to avoid being forced into a marriage with Blifil. Her father pursues her. Mr. Allworthy arrives in town, in search of his nephew. A number of amorous intrigues now add to the dynamic perplexity of a plot which seems, by this time, beyond the skill of man to unravel; but again the Byzantine solution is applied. Revelation and recognition bring about the denouement with breathless speed and almost lyrical precision. Villainy is unmasked, and Tom, his origin no longer a mystery, restored to favour, and accepted by Allworthy as his heir, encounters no opposition from Squire Western to his union with Sophia. Blifil's punishment belongs to the realm of poetic justice—he is forced to turn Methodist in order to marry a rich widow of the faith.

As if to sharpen the outlines of his character-drawing, Fielding makes great use of contrast. Tom, generous, warm-hearted, loyal, and unable to conceive that others are less noble than himself, has a foil in Blifil, who is an odious compound of fine sentiments and self-interest, a mean-spirited reversal of the hero. Throughout the story Fielding resembles Meredith, in approaching his characters in the manner of the Comic Spirit. Shafts of clear cold light play on them from all sides, throwing now this, now that aspect into prominence, in an ironic chiaroscuro that illustrates by light and shadow. The philosophy is never doctrinaire. It is the fruit of experience and reflection. Rejecting the sentimental heresy that virtue brings its own reward, often a material one, Fielding does not encourage his characters to do good except for the satisfaction of doing so. Generous impulses, rooted in unselfishness and respect for others, he thinks the best guarantee of virtue.

Tom Jones, the longest of Fielding's novels, was also his major contribution to the development of English fiction. In spite of the large number of characters and the many changes of scene, the plot is constructed with great care, but it is the plot of a dramatist, however, and it is interesting that Coleridge—no mean student of the novel—asserted that there were only two better plots in existence, those of *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles and *The Alchemist* of Ben Jonson.

Fielding's last novel, *Amelia* (1751), reflected a change of outlook. Gone was the hearty, indecorous humour, the bold, free delineation, the pulsing zest for life. The luminous quality of his world—that exhalation of his joy in creating—was dulled. For three years Fielding had been a Justice of the Peace for Westminster and contact with crime, squalor, disease and, worst of all, venality had depressed and disillusioned him. His health was failing, and the atmosphere of his last book suggests the gathering shadows. The reading public, too, were all for tears and sensibility, and Fielding's earlier heartiness was out of tune. Fastidious critics thought him coarse and insensitive, and the praise persistently denied him was lavished on Richardson. So he, too, decided to look at life through the tears of one who feels, instead of greeting it with the laughter of the Comic Spirit. The change is shown in a tendency in *Amelia* to take sides, and champion those whose innocence and helplessness made them victims of a venal justice. Gone is the detachment demanded of him by comedy and intellectual realism.

Amelia Booth is a married woman whose shining goodness, devotion and resourcefulness are sorely tried by her loving but errant husband, over whom gambling and extravagant excesses have too powerful a hold. Cheated by a sister out of her rightful inheritance, wronged by her husband's treacherous friends, Amelia triumphs over the circumstances in which poverty and her husband's folly have enmeshed her. There is plenty of pathos and some irony but not much humour. Authenticity is given to the details of everyday life by such incidents as Amelia's having to refuse her children tarts for supper, and denying herself half a pint of white wine to relieve her gloomy spirits, while Booth squanders ten times the sum in a gambling den. The novel set an example in homely and simple narrative that other writers, notably Goldsmith, were quick to follow. Dr. Johnson found Mrs. Booth

"the most pleasing heroine of all romance."

After Fielding the novel bounded ahead, freed from its slavery to fact, conscious of its power and possibilities and firmly established as an independent literary genre. Its immense popularity with the reading public was proved by the torrent of novels that poured from the press.

To the novel of sensibility of Richardson and that of character and humour shaped by Fielding, Tobias Smollett (1721–71) added satiric caricature. In contrast to the great humanity of Fielding, Smollett, for all his brilliance, has a certain waspishness. He seems to goad his victims into their entertaining antics. His own temper was irritable, and the frustrations of his life aggravated a natural condition. His sarcasm was unrestrained, and yet perhaps it was an overstrung sensibility which drew him towards ugliness and evil. What seems a sadistic delight in touching the nerves of the reader with horror and pain sprang from an awareness, not too common in his day, of the sheer inhumanity of the eighteenth century. His rage was disciplined by humour and he found relief in turning the world to ridicule.

Smollett was born in 1721 and came of a good Scottish family, but some bitterness, occasioned by the indifference of his grandfather, warped him. He studied medicine in Glasgow, but his heart, like Fielding's, was given to the stage. In 1739 he came to London with a play, *The Regicide*, in his pocket. But the theatre would have none of him and he was forced to go to sea as a surgeon on board H.M.S. *Cumberland*, and it so happened was present at Cartagena. However little to his taste this adventure was, it served him well later as a novelist when he disclosed a new vein of naval fiction that he was to explore most profitably. But the stark horror of surgery before chloroform, the obscene brutality of life in the floating prisons, the disease and leprous foulness, both moral and physical, might havè proved too much for him had he not found a way to insulate his raw susceptibilities by satirical comedy.

On his return to England in 1744 Smollett set up as a doctor on his wife's fortune, but his instinctive extravagance made him choose Downing Street for his residence, and lavish entertainment soon strained his exiguous means to breaking-point. Failing as a doctor, he turned to literature, and in 1748 published *Roderick Random*. Whereas Richardson had been

over fifty, and Feilding thirty-five, Smollett was still in his twenties when he wrote his first novel. *Roderick Random* certainly bears evidence of this in its torrential exuberance of incident and fertile inventiveness, as well as in its harsh judgements and leering malice.

Technically it is modelled on Lesage's *Gil Blas* and so belongs to the older picaresque tradition. A series of episodes, told with vigour and vividness, are linked together in the life of the selfish and unprincipled hero, who relates them. Smollett ushers us into a disagreeable world in which the commonest emotions spring from malice, envy, spite, cruelty and uncharitableness, while mutual derision forms the basis of most acquaintanceships. To a far greater extent than Fielding Smollett seized on physical peculiarities, on psychological traits that reveal twisted natures, and on any absurdities whatever the nature. His is the art of caricature and its excellence lies in the startling brilliance with which externals are caught. The chief interest in the book is in the picture that it gives, drawn from the personal experience, of the British Navy and the British sailor of the day.

There is no inwardness at all in Smollett, only a certain hard, inescapable accuracy which the absence of emotion saves from being consistently horrible. The only really attractive quality about his books is the whimsical humanity that lights up his seadogs—Commodore Trunnion, Tom Bowling, Pipes and Hatchway. These seadogs, each of them individualized beyond reach of generalization, were something new in fiction, strange marine monsters whose clotted absurdities and racy naval idiom set a fashion in gambolling eccentricity and gruff humour. The first was Tom Bowling. He is Roderick's maternal uncle and rescues the hero from a cold, indifferent grandfather and a horde of hostile, acquisitive cousins. Later deprived of his uncle's guidance, Roderick takes to the road and meets with many adventures at the hands of rogues of various kinds, and qualifies as a surgeon's mate in the navy. He is pressed as a common sailor on board the man-of-war *Thunder*, and, after suffering much misery and ill-treatment, returns to England. The inevitable gyrations of fortune are at length brought to a happy end by a fantastic recognition scene, when Roderick finds an unexpected father in the supposed Spaniard, Don Roderigo.

Roderick Random showed such sparkling wit and fecund

imagination that many critics attributed it to Fielding. In truth Smollett, except for his grossness, which the Victorians would have found intolerable, is a forerunner of Dickens in his exuberance of invention.

The real interest of his second picaresque novel *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) lies in the study of his greatest seadog of them all, Peregrine's godfather, Commodore Hawser Trunnion, who

> does not live like any other Christian landsman, but keeps garrison in his house as if he were in sight of his enemies and makes his servants turn out in the night, watch and watch, as he calls it, all the year round. His habitation is defended by a ditch over which he has laid a drawbridge, and planted his courtyard with peteroes continually loaded with shot, under the direction of Mr. Hatchway.

The Commodore's vocabulary matches his lair, and illustrates Smollett's interest in suiting speech to character. Trunnion is a confirmed misogynist but his resistance in this last respect is overcome by the determined assaults of Miss Grizzle, Perry's aunt, and he resigns himself to matrimony.

> Well, since it must be so, I think we must e'en grapple. But 'tis a hard case that a fellow of my years should be compelled d'ye see, to beat up windward all the rest of his life, against currents of his own inclination.

It is the Commodore who spoils Peregrine, delighting in the boy's practical jokes and wayward egotism. In the scene where Trunnion is on his deathbed, Smollett rises above his customary levity and wrings pathos out of the seaman's speech :

> Swab the spray from your bowsprit, my good lad, and coil up your spirits. Many a better man has foundered before he has made half my way ; though I trust, by the mercy of God, I shall be sure in port in a very few glasses, and fast moored in a most blessed riding; for my good friend Jolter hath overhauled the journal of my sins, and by the observation he hath taken of the state of my soul I hope I shall happily conclude my voyage and be brought up in the altitude of heaven.

His epitaph is a fitting commentary not only on Trunnion's life but on the whole naval tradition of Great Britain :

Here lies
Founderd in a fathom and a Half
The shell
of
Hawser Trunnion, Esq.,
Formerly in command of a Squadron
In His Majesty's Service
Who broached to, at Five p.m. Oct X.
In the year of his age
Threescore and nineteen.
He kept his guns always loaded
And his tackle ready manned
And never showed his poop to the enemy
Except when he took her in tow;
But
His shot being expended
His match burnt out
And his upper works decayed
He was sunk
By death's superior weight of metal
Nevertheless
He will be weighed again
At the Great Day,
His rigging refitted,
And his timbers repaired,
And with one broadside,
Make his adversary,
Strike in his turn.

Smollett followed up his success with *Peregrine Pickle* by *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753). This is the story of an unmitigated villain, son of a camp-follower in Marlborough's army, who takes the title of count without having any claim to it. Endowed with talents and adroitness, but with no spark of honour or decency, he is received and brought up in the family of the German Count Melville and he repays benevolence by attempting to beguile the Count's daughter into marriage. When this fails he organizes a series of thefts on the family, using the daughter's maid as a confederate. Fathom passes from fraud to fraud and seduction, in repulsive succession. He betrays Renaldo, the son of his benefactor, and attempts to seduce Monimia, the woman Renaldo is about to marry. Fathom is finally detected in his

crimes and imprisoned but an unconvincing repentance saves him from his proper deserts.

The criminal biography owed its inspiration to Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*, and, written in a tone of caustic irony, makes no attempt to gain sympathy for the pseudo-hero, who, mockingly indifferent to his own egotism, invariably betrays those who trust him. Certain incidents in the book—such as Fathom's experience of terror when he is lost in the great gloomy forest, and the macabre episode of the murder that follows, and Renaldo's meeting with Monimia's shade in the tomb—are of interest in anticipating later romanticism. They have a sombre magnificence which might have made Smollett, had he lived longer, a formidable contributor to the new Gothic Terror novel of the next decade.

His next important work was *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*, which appeared serially in 1763. All the familiar ingredients of a Smollett novel, nautical imagery, salty sailor terms, cruel caricatures and ludicrous situations, are present in this story of an eighteenth-century Don Quixote which is at the same time an attack on religious and political humbug.

Smollett's later years were made wretched by financial worries, literary drudgery, the death of his daughter, and a general sense of failure. He left England for a time, and on his return went on a tour of his homeland in 1766. This excursion gave him material for his last novel—the mildest and mellowest—*Humphry Clinker* (1768). The book was finished in Italy, where he had gone for his health. Smollett died at Monte Nero near Leghorn in 1771. Possibly the agreeable climate and lovely prospects softened his asperity of temper and subdued his caustic wit, inducing a serenity which enabled him at last to view the world with slightly more toleration. *Humphry Clinker* is written in the form of a diary of a tour consisting largely of letters sent by the principal travellers to their friends. The method is used not to analyze feeling, as in Richardson, but to bring out the humour of conflicting points of view. The same scenes are described by different characters with a comic disparity of judgment.

Chief among the correspondents is the crusty philanthropist Matthew Bramble, a highly temperamental spectator of his own and other people's follies, as irascible to the latter as he

is amused by the former. With him are his sister Tabitha, a cattish spinster of dim intelligence, and her tiresome dog ; his niece Lydia a languishing young beauty whose amorous susceptibilities distress in different ways both her hypochondriac uncle and her hot-tempered brother. The latter, Jerry Melford, also one of the party, endures Bramble's tetchiness and idiosyncrasies for the sake of his expectations. The party is completed by Humphry Clinker himself, a poor ragged postilion picked up by the travellers on the road. He is a sickly lad, a foundling whose plight provokes a tender piece of irony from Matthew Bramble :

> Hark ye, Clinker, you are a most notorious offender. You stand convicted of sickness, hunger, wretchedness and want, but it does not belong to me to punish criminals. I will only take upon me the task of giving you a word of advice—get a shirt with all convenient despatch, and clothe yourself decently.

So saying, he pressed a guinea into Humphry's hand.

Conforming to the taste of the time, the story ends (after the discovery that Bramble's real name is Lloyd) with a touching recognition scene in which Humphry Clinker produces an old snuffbox containing a small cornelian seal and two scraps of paper which establish his identity as Matthew's son. Lydia, too, is made happy by the discovery that the strolling player with whom she has fallen in love is in truth the son of her uncle's old college friend. The lovers are duly "noosed" and the story ends in a baze of bliss.

A distinguished critic of the novel has pointed out that : "Fielding had dealt in character as well as in characters. Smollett's concern was the superficial features of temperament, mannerisms in which men differ, not with the deeper human qualities that unite them." Smollett could not draw characters in the round, only in the flat. Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle and Humphry Clinker are flat characters ; they can be looked at and laughed at but they are without any inner reality. They are marionettes in the hands of a skilful puppet master. But his skill is such that he cannot only make the shadow play exciting but can satisfy us that the puppets have life and individuality.

By the seventeen sixties the sensibility of Richardson, the proud genius and copiousness of Fielding, allied to the

brilliantly satiric powers of Smollett's observation, had prepared the mould in which the English novel would continue to be cast for the next hundred years. These eighteenth-century novelists are on the whole behaviourists in psychology and pragmatists in philosophy. Their ostensible purpose in fiction – the Novel of Terror experiment apart – was to draw to the life the contemporary world in broad realistic strokes. At their best they created character; at a lower level merely fashioned "characters" – those palimpsests so scrawled over with peculiarities that the original outlines are blurred and lost. These neatly self-contained psychological types of choler, phlegm, high spirits and melancholy hark back, in fact, to the seventeenth-century characteries from which they are descended.

After Richardson there was little attempt or none at portraying more introspective characters motives were not explored and the still places of the soul left undisturbed. Neither Fielding nor Smollett. who both exercised a great influence on the formal development of the novel, showed any interest in the identity behind the eccentricity. This unconcern with subjective states of consiousness bore very hardly on the women in their novels. "Perhaps the flattest and thinnest of all the flat characters in fiction are those unfortunate women in the novels in the eighteenth century who stray upon the stage like a dancer in a musical comedy whenever the producer feels that the strain of asking the human mind to work consecutively has grown too great." It was not until the time of Charlotte and Emily Brontë that novelists began to consider the feminine nature seriously in fiction and explore its ranges. Before that – Jane Austen's young ladies apart—if women are young they are presented as beautiful and good; if older, they are often the counterparts of the males, ridiculous, Hogarthian, gnarled and twisted viragos and catamarans. We laugh at them; sometimes we laugh with them; we are never expected to understand them.

The solid brilliance and sheer achievement of the major eighteenth-century novelist has tended to blind us to the limitations both of method and interest they imposed on the English novel. Plots are all-important. When the author tells the story he is omniscient and the plot is tightly constructed on the lines of a stage play with much complication leading

to a denouement. Experiences are artificially shaped to conform to this dramatic construction. The natural flow of life is halted and the impression conveyed is that of a rigidly determined pattern of events. The effect of this technigue on the presentation of character is obvious. Magnificent as so many of the personalities are in the eighteenth-century novel by reason of the full-blooded enthusiasm which created them, yet they tend to fall into types and are set off one against another for comic emphasis.

Even more significant than the limitations of method was the restriction on the scope of interest. The eighteenth-century novel is, on the whole, deficient in poetry and in moral passion.

> Towards any misdoing by persons of one sex towards persons of the other, when it involved brutality or treachery, Fielding was pitiless ; but when treachery and brutality were not concerned, he was, to say the least, facile. So, too, he probably knew by experience—he certainly knew by native shrewdness and acquired observation—that to look too much on the wine when it is red, or on the cards when they are parti-coloured, is ruinous to health and fortune ; but he thought not overbadly of any man who did these things.

The passion of love was as much a closed book to the eighteenth-century novelists as the moral passion, and consequently the love interest is treated either conventionally or with broad humour. Of the tragic upheavals that agitate the soul there was nothing. Stock answers were always ready to set the seal of silence on questions that might threaten the complacent self-assurance of the age. Content to tell a story, preferably one with a happy ending coming after some masterly complicating of all the issues at stake, and to portray recognizably lifelike characters, the eighteenth-century novelists were blind to the subtler implications and the almost limitless possibilities of their medium.

CHAPTER 4

The Dynamic of Eccentricity

NO SOONER HAD Fielding developed the novel form as epic narrative enlivened by dramatic incidents, with the infinitely complicated parts close linked in a firm chain of causation, than a bombshell was flung at the whole idea of good construction by the *enfant terrible* of fiction—Laurence Sterne (1713–68). Scattering the "well-made" plot into a thousand fragments, he wrote a novel, *Tristram Shandy*, with no plot at all, no heroine and no action, and obeying no other law than that of caprice and random association. Sterne was a rebel in thought and style. In the days of sonorous Johnsonian prose, he achieved an easy conversational manner; in the Age of Reason, he asserted boldly that the appeal to reason was less potent than the appeal to imagination.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. (1760–7) is of considerable importance in the history of fiction, for it showed how flexible the novel was and what liberties could be taken with it by a writer bent on expressing a wilful personality. Sterne proved that ideas could take the place of episodes, that verbal escapades were no less entertaining than action, and, moreover, that two elderly gentlemen with a passion for talking could fascinate the reader as effectively as dashing heroes and languishing heroines.

Laurence Sterne was born at Clonmel in Ireland in 1713, the son of a subaltern in the army, and, after some years of wandering from garrison to garrison, spent eight years at school in Halifax. The death of his father left him penniless and he was sent by a cousin as a sizar to St. John's College, Cambridge. After taking orders he became vicar of Sutton-in-the-Forest in 1738 and remained there until 1759, the year he started to write *Tristram Shandy*.

A great part of Sterne's life had been passed obscurely in York, where the patronage of relations had provided him with a living and much of his time was spent in painting, fiddling, shooting, and collecting books and cultivating the society of the Master of Skelton Castle, John Hall-Stevenson, one of the "monks of Medmenham". Hall-Stevenson was a "mad, bad humorist," whose craziness was of a kind to recommend itself to the author of *Tristram Shandy*. But twenty years of

obscurity were suddenly dispelled when in 1760 the first two volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* appeared. While the work was still in manuscript, Sterne had read it aloud to friends and the precious pages were nearly lost to the world for ever when one of them fell asleep and the outraged author in anger threw the papers into the fire. Some friends—though far from bored—were horrified to discover that a well-known York doctor was satirized in the person of the utterly incompetent Dr. Slop. Others were disturbed by the gross allusions which they censured as unbecoming in a clergyman ; but when Sterne shocked he did it deliberately, and he refused to cramp his wit to save his character.

As a writer Sterne is a plagiarist of genius—the child of his books—who arrived at originality through the brains of other men, and heaped up treasure by plundering his predecessors. When his library was sold in 1768 it was found to contain a rich and rare collection of heterogeneous volumes, on all the odd topics which were to crop up as the batlike whimsies fluttering in Mr. Shandy's mind. *The Prophecies af Nostradamus* jostled a study of Dioptrics ; Young on *Opium* stood beside Vauban's *New Method of Fortifications* ; Nicholl on *Midwifery* was flanked by Meibonius on *Flogging*, while Burthogge on *Reason and the Nature of Spirits* was enlivened by proximity to the *Letters of Ninon de L'Enclos* and the novels of Miss Minnifie, while these in their turn were sobered by *The Praise of Hell* or *A View of the Infernal Regions*.

Apart from these stimulating oddities there were, of course, the great perpetual sources of Sterne's literary inspiration, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the works of Rabelais, and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. From these he borrowed freely, quoting, paraphrasing, lifting not only the thought but the cadences and making all his own. Sterne made books as apothecaries made medicines—by pouring from one vessel into another. The result was an intoxicating elixir which led a contemporary to describe him as "a writer infinitely more ingenious and entertaining than any of the race of novelists".

Much of the delight in *Tristram Shandy* lay in the element of surprise. Sterne once declared that if he thought the reader had the faintest idea of what the next sentence would be he would destroy it. Instead of continuous narrative

and a plot covering twenty or thirty years of the hero's life and involving half a hundred characters, the action was confined to the back parlour of Shandy Hall, where with great difficulty the hero was engaged in getting himself born. By the end of the last volume he is about to be breeched. Of his life there was nothing, and the opinions that form the subject of the book emanate from his peevish theory-haunted father, who did not belie his name, for Shand or Shandy in the Yorkshire dialect is a word for gay, unsteady or crack-brained.

This quaint tale (with an embryo as a hero and the main interest centring on two elderly gentlemen who do nothing but talk) was a far cry from conventional fiction.

Mr. Shandy, a retired Turkey merchant, spends his time with his books and his brother Toby, the placid foil to his own irascible genius. Shandy is a Quixote, but his adventures take place in the world of ideas, where he is a mighty destroyer of common sense, and a doughty defender of hare-brained speculations. Toby is his Sancho Panza—sweet reasonableness in person—whose boldest flight of disagreement is to whistle "Lillibulero" at a dialectical impasse. The two brothers dovetail perfectly. Unfortunately for himself, Mr. Shandy, though master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature, has a wife with such a headpiece that he cannot hang up a single inference inside of it to save his soul from destruction. She cannot be persuaded to ask a question, and having been told a thousand times that the sun went round the earth, can never remember which it is. Conversation with her is limited to proposition, reply (invariably agreement) and rejoinder generally provocative) from Mr. Shandy, and there the matter languishes until the restless, fecund wit of Mr. Shandy hazards another proposition destined to fade perceptibly in the same brief phases. The chapter on the breeching of Tristram is a brilliant example of this delightful one-sided dialogue. Happily there is "my Uncle Toby". Without Toby, that gentle sentimentalist, full of quiet good humour, with his modesty and innocent misapprehensions, Mr. Shandy's testiness, his spleen, would find no vent, his whimsies and absurd theories would die stillborn. The brothers are perfect foils and in each the comedy of personality is played out to the full.

Two master theories dominate the Shandean System—the mystic power of names and the importance of long noses. It

is Mr. Shandy's belief, for which he can quote impressive authorities, that the name influences the character. Some names are neutral and indifferent, some are detrimental and some are of such potency that they can inspire the holder to transcend himself.

> How many *Caesars* and *Pompeys*, he would say, by the mere inspiration of the names, have been rendered worthy of them? And how many, he would add, are there, who might have done exceedingly well in the world had not their characters and spirits been totally depressed and *Nicodemused* into nothing?... But of all the means in the universe, he had the most unconquerable aversion for *Tristram*—he had the lowest and most contemptible opinion of it of anything in the world; thinking that such a melancholy disyllable could possibly produce nothing *in rerum natura*, but what was extremely mean and pitiful....

Noses were equally important.

> He would often declare, in speaking his thought upon the subject, that he did not conceive how the greatest family in *England* could stand it out against an uninterrupted succession of short noses.—And for the contrary reason, he would generally add. That it must be one of the greatest problems in civil life, where the same number of long and jolly noses, following one another in a direct line, did not raise and hoist it up into the best vacancies in the kingdom.—He would often boast that the *Shandy* family rank'd very high in King *Harry* the VIIIth's time, but owed its rise to no state engine—he would say—but to that only;—but that, like other families, he would add—it had felt the turn of the wheel, and had never recovered the blow of my great-grandfather's nose.—It was an ace of clubs indeed, he would cry, shaking his head—and as vile a one for an unfortunate family as ever turn'd up trumps.

Mr. Shandy's distress, on learning that the incompetent Dr. Slop in bringing the hero into the world has crushed his nose as flat as a pancake, can be imagined. In a supreme effort to avert the inevitable ignominy foreshadowed by this disaster, he determines to bestow on the child the greatest name of all—Trismegistus. Again Mr. Shandy is doomed to frustration. The maid entrusted with the task of telling the curate the child's name forgets it:

> There is no christian-name in the world, said the curate, beginning with *Tris*—but *Tristram*. Then 'tis *Tristram*—gistus, quoth Susannah. There is no "gistus" to it, noodle,

'tis my own name, replied the curate, dipping his hand, as he spoke, into the bason—"*Tristram*" said he, etc. etc. etc., so *Tristram* was I called, and *Tristram* shall I be to the day of my death.

In a world of Hobby Horses, it is unlikely that Uncle Toby should not have one. He delights in fortification, and having been wounded at the siege of Namur and retired from active service he spends much of his time in company with his man Corporal Trim building fortifications in the garden. Toby is at length besieged by his neighbour the Widow Wadman, whose eyes flash delicious lambent fire, but the enemy voluntarily withdraws from the garrison she has so successfully assaulted when she discovers the nature of his wound.

Into *Tristram Shandy* Sterne poured the oddest of inventions, paradoxes, sallies, irrelevances and reflections. Even more peculiar than the theme was the form of the novel. Never did a book owe so much to the material dress of thought. Everything added to the confusion in a book which concealed its preface at the end of the third volume. Blank pages pretended to be chapters. Others were marbled or blacked out. Lines pirouetted across the page like cabalistic designs. A chapter might consist of five sentences or only one. Others of more normal length ended in a delirium of asterisks. Fabulous authorities were solemnly quoted alongside the greatest names in the history of ideas and the whole book breathed the unmistakable odour of eighteenth-century erudition.

A mixed reception awaited the book. In York, where the characters were immediately identified, it enjoyed a *succes de scandale*. Many people were shocked; Dr. Johnson, Horace Walpole and Goldsmith denounced it on moral and literary grounds. Richardson saw little in it but "unaccountable wildness, whimsical incoherences, uncommon indecencies."

In the Victorian era critics, repelled by its Rabelaisian wit and holding to the paralysing theory that literary humour must conform to what men considered fitting for ladies, condemned it *en bloc*. Others, like the friends to whom Sterne first read his story, would have accepted the bawdiness from a layman—since the age was not squeamish—but felt that wanton indelicacy was unbecoming in a clergyman. Some could see in the typographical eccentricities, the blanks

and asterisks and other follies, only signs of insufferable buffoonery. But the effects were an essential counterpart of the fantastic theories. *Le style c'est Tristram Shandy.* The author himself admitted that he used nonsense to convey sense. He warned his readers to give him credit for wisdom, even when he puts on a fool's cap with bells on it.

To a modern reader, brought up on the impressionism of Virginia Woolf and the massive perversity of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* the spirit of *Tristram Shandy* is altogether congenial for its puckish humour and individual charm. Sterne went on adding to it, and the last two volumes abandon the narrative to give an account of the author's travels in France and the story of the King of Bohemia.

The success of the book can best be gauged from the fact that Dodsley, Sterne's publisher, at first thought fifty pounds too much to risk on a single volume, but eagerly accepted the third and fourth for three hundred and eighty pounds. Lord Barthurst took Sterne under his protection as the wit who most reminded him of the glorious days of Queen Anne. He received the perpetual curacy of Coxwold, where he named his house Shandy Hall and became one of the most-sought-after men in England by members of society anxious to patronize the wittiest and most original novelist. Even the new fashion in sensibility owed something to the stories of Uncle Toby and the fly, and the ass and the macaroon. Many people followed the example of the Moorish girl mentioned by Sterne and got rid of flies not by killing or torturing them but by gently brushing them aside and spouting cold water on them.

In 1768 he published two volumes of his next book, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy,* a book of considerable charm written with a flawless ease of manner and delightful insouciance. Sterne died in 1768.

By this time the novel had become not only an approved literary form, but a profitable form of literature.

Dr. Johnson, the greatest literary figure of the age, turned to it in 1759 when he needed money to meet the expenses of his mother's death. The result was the first philosophical novel in the language. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.* It was written in a week, but showed no trace either of hurried composition or of the profound grief that Johnson felt at the loss of his mother.

In this didactic novel Johnson used the framework of the exotic Eastern tale. Ever since the first decade of the eighteenth century, when a translation was made of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, orientalism had been popular in England. Addison employed Eastern fairy tales in the *Spectator* to point a moral, while Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*—a Chinese philosopher—delighted English readers by the shrewd urbanity with which this privileged representative of an old civilization commented on their own. Dr. Johnson himself had already introduced oriental tales into the *Rambler*, and over twenty years before, in 1735, had translated Father Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* into English from the original Latin.

Rasselas is set in an Ethiopian Arcadia which in its enchanting simplicity recalls the Elizabethan romances of Sir Philip Sidney and Robert Greene.

> Here the sons and daughters of Abyssinia lived only to know the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose, attended by all that were skilful to delight, and gratified with whatever the senses can enjoy. They wandered in gardens of fragrance, and slept in the fortresses of security. Every art was practised to make them pleased with their own condition. The sages who instructed them told them of nothing but the miseries of public life, and described all beyond the mountain as regions of calamity, where discord was always raging, and where man preyed upon man.
>
> To heighten their opinion of their own felicity, they were daily entertained with songs, the subject of which was the Happy Valley. Their appetites were excited by frequent enumerations of different enjoyments; and revelry and merriment was the business of every hour, from the dawn of morning to the close of even.
>
> These methods were generally successful: few of the princes had ever wished to enlarge their bounds, but passed their lives in full conviction that they had all within their reach that art or nature could bestow, and pitied those whom fate had excluded from this seat of tranquillity, as the sport of chance and the slaves of misery.

Rasselas, a son of the Emperor of Abyssinia, however, grows weary of the joys of the Happy Valley and yearns for some desire that will give him an incentive. He confides his discontent to the philosopher, Imlac, who warns him that the outer world is so full of miseries that did he but know of them he would quickly be reconciled to his own happiness. At last

the Prince has something to desire. He wants to escape from the Happy Valley, and see the world outside, when he may find the secret of content.

A mechanist offers to make him a flying machine, on condition that the Prince pledges himself to silence.

> "You, sir, whose curiosity is so extensive, will easily conceive with what pleasure a philosopher, furnished with wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth, and all its inhabitants, rolling beneath him, and presenting to him successively, by its diurnal motion, all the countries within the same parallel. How must it amuse the pendent spectator to see the moving scene of land and ocean, cities and deserts! To survey with equal security the marts of trade, and the fields of battle; mountains infested by barbarians, and fruitful regions gladdened by plenty and lulled by peace!"

When the Prince demurs, considering the difficulties, he is told:

> "Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objection must first be overcome. . . . But I will work only on this condition, that the art shall not be divulged, and that you shall not require me to make wings for any but ourselves." "Why," said Rasselas, "should you envy others so great an advantage? All skill ought to be exerted for universal good; every man has owed much to others, and ought to repay the kindness he has received." "If men were all virtuous," returned the artist, "I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly. But what would be the security or the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds, neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security. A flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region that was rolling under them. Even this valley, the retreat of princes, the abode of happiness, might be violated by the sudden descent of some of the naked nations that swarm on the coast of the southern sea."

At length the Prince and his little party, under the guidance of Imlac, discover a way of leaving the Valley and proceed to Cairo. Here he studies the various conditions of men's lives, for Rasselas thinks "surely happiness is somewhere to be found." In Cairo they explore social life. Rasselas

accepts the gaiety, high spirits and careless laughter as a reality and is led to believe that the world overflows with universal plenty. But further acquaintance with the society of youth causes him to recoil from their callowness, weary and disgusted:

> Their mirth was without images; their laughter without motives; their pleasures were gross and sensual in which the mind had no part; their conduct was at once wild and mean; they laughed at order and law; but the frown of power dejected and the eye of wisdom abashed them.

From youth and its insubstantial joys the Prince turns to the teachers of morality, who, he believes, have discovered true wisdom by subjecting the desires to the control of reason. Again he is disappointed, for he finds that "they discourse like angels, but they live like men." While the Prince and Imlac continue to study public life and find there, no matter how disguised, the bitter truth that the secret of happiness is not divulged to man, the Princess Nekeyah is willingly entertained by private families who are enchanted by her charm and good nature. In the evenings the brother and sister meet and relate to each other the occurrences of the day.

Domestic life, the Princess discovers, is no more fortunate than public life and no more free from discontent. Imperious husbands, perverse wives, disobedient children alike promote discord and unhappiness. Marriages that are the outcome of youthful romance and momentary ardour are contrasted with those that proceed from considered judgment. But whether the result of passion or prudence the results are the same. "Marriage has many pains but celibacy has no pleasures" is the final judgment passed by the brother and sister on the state of human affairs, an apophthegm depressing in its balanced pessimism.

After a few incidents of no particular interest and a final encounter with a mad astronomer, who believes he can control the forces of nature, an episode which gives Johnson an opportunity to dilate on the dangers of unrestrained fancy, the little party return to the Happy Valley. They decide that no system is perfect and that the value of each is a subjective

matter. Nekeyah decides that of all sublunary things knowledge is the best:

> .. she desired first to learn all sciences, and then proposed to found a college of learned women, in which she would preside.,.and raise up for the next age models of prudence, and patterns of piety. The prince desired a little kingdom in which he could administer justice in his own person. [The others] were contented to be driven along the stream of life, without directing their course to any particular port. Of these wishes they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained.

To readers tired of the boisterous violence and bewildering succession of events in Smollett and the picaresque writer, the gentle, reflective calm of *Rasselas* was very welcome. In a new and exotic garb they could enjoy the weighty, considered arguments and compelling sententiate of the "great moralist." The orientalism of *Rasselas* is entirely confined to the names. No attempt is made at realism. Manners, customs and ways of speech are entirely occidental. They suggest the conversations that might take place in the Fellows' garden of some old college as the shadows lengthen across the shaven lawns—rather than contemporary Abyssinia. The wisdom, too, is in the best English eighteenth-century tradition. It is a Christian Stoicism, that looks manfully at life; knows that much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed; refuses to feed extravagant hopes of facile Utopias; accepts the limits set by reason to speculative thought, and meets Fortune's whims in a mood of patient resignation. *Rasselas* denies the utilitarian optimism that underlay Richardson's conception of duty. The conclusions of the philosopher Imlac, who speaks for Johnson, are as indisputable as they are often disputed. Slight as *Rasselas* may be among the novels of the period, it is nevertheless important in that it is the first example of a novel consisting of a series of philosophical essays strung on a thin thread of story.

While Johnson was philosophizing and Sterne letting his fancy rove in the pages of *Tristram Shandy*, Oliver Goldsmith was taming and domesticating the pastoral romance. His masterpiece of fiction, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, was written in 1761-2, but not published until 1766. According to a

popular story, Dr. Johnson was responsible for the publication. Hearing that his friend was about to be arrested for debt, the Doctor is said to have hurried round to his lodging to relieve his distress and was given the manuscript of a novel to read. He recognised its excellence and took it to a publisher, obtaining sixty pounds for it, but publication was delayed until Goldsmith had established his reputation with his poem *The Traveller*. Once published, the success of *The Vicar of Wakefield* was never for a moment in doubt, and it remains among the handful of eighteenth-century novels that are alive in the sense of being widely read today.

The story is told by the Rev. Dr. Primrose, the Vicar, kindly, charitable, devoid of worldly wisdom and not without some literary vanity. This man, equally incapable of a wise action, an uncharitable sentiment or a harsh judgment, is thought to be an idealized portrait of Goldsmith's father. Patient in adversity, humble when fortune smiles, indulgent to harmless folly, the Vicar is always ready to forgive the sinner while reproving the sin. His unworldliness and good nature cause him to be imposed upon and his unsuspecting mind is apt to misjudge his friends when policy forces them to be disingenuous. In many ways he recalls Parson Adams. Nothing shakes his equable kindliness but the sin of reiterated nuptials, for Dr. Primrose is an absolute monogamist.

In plot, *The Vicar of Wakefield* shows some affinity with the picaresque tradition in subjecting the hero to rapid gyrations of fortune, and with the narrative enlivened by dramatic episodes established by Fielding. But in spirit the book belongs to the sentimental school. Every question is resolved in terms of goodness. Goldsmith speaks with the heart; his humanitarianism proclaims itself in the attack on duelling, on the severity of the penal code, and in the appeal for reform. He is instrumental in associating goodness of heart with simplicity and in finding virtue in the lowly and humble.

Although lacking the breadth of Fielding's vast canvases and the intensity of Richardson's masterpiece *Clarissa, The Vicar of Wakefield* is an attractive book to which the sunny, happy narration is broken by philosophic generalization which suggests the sincerity of Johnson without the pomposity. Goldsmith has, moreover, the happy knack of indicating the universal foible in the particular example. Moses, the gree-

boy, so confident of his shrewd businesslike mentality, is the eternal dupe in every man, just as Ephraim Jenkinson, the specious rogue with his one set speech and air of benign trustfulness, is the eternal confidence trickster, unabashed and perennially ready to cheat the inevitable fool that fate sets in his way. Mrs. Primrose with her romantic dreams for her children is every sentimental mother from Mrs. Bennett to Christina Pontifex.

Apart from the excellences of style and characterization, *The Vicar of Wakefield* was important as the first masterpiece of domostic fiction; its real theme was the home and the hearth; it was a drama of the new social life. The social revolution of the seventeenth century had long been accepted, class distinctions had sharpened and a definite social stratum—the middle class—had come into its own and discovered as its own particular problem the conflict between morality and materialism.

The Vicar of Wakefield unfolded a line of development that led on through Dickens to many novelists who today are engaged in presenting the "typical Englishman" to himself. He is one for whom the heart is a surer guide than the head, and the satisfaction of moral scruples more important than the realization of ambition. Goodness and disinterestedness are fused in an invincible ideal, towards which the inner consciousness aspires, perhaps in recoil from its own practical instincts and utilitarian precepts. Goldsmith's Vicar, who bears all misfortunes with fortitude and resignation, who, when a particularly vicious turn of Fortune's wheel lands him in prison, simply sets out to reform the prisoners, and is never so confident of victory as in the midst of defeat, is a character that did not ask in vain to be loved by generations of novel readers.

No novelist of genius appeared between Sterne and Jane Austen, but talent abounded, and of the multiplication of books there was no end. Circulating libraries flourished, despite the moralists. Bockseller's hacks were kept busy furbishing stories to satisfy the ever-growing demand. Standards fell as novels appeared in their thousands, but some interesting experiments were made, and some powerful influences that were not fully felt until much later were set in motion.

In Robert Paltock's *Peter Wilkins* (1750) sentimentalism

was wedded to a fanciful imagination and a taste for Utopia. Wilkins is shipwrecked in the Antarctic region and reaches a land inhabited by a strange winged race of "glums" and "gawries" enveloped in an outer silk-like skin which can be spread and enables them to fly. This new race is blameless and very beautiful and Wilkins captures one of them and finds it is a woman of surpassing loveliness. The rapturous love idyll she inspires touched a sensitive chord in the romantic poets, and won high praise from Coleridge, Leigh Hunt and others. Southey's "Glendoveers" in his *Curse of Kehama* were suggested by the "gawries."

More immediately influential was the "sentimental" novel *The Fool of Quality, or the Adventures of Henry, Earl of Moreland* (1766-72) by Henry Brooke. The hero, Henry, the second son of the Earl of Moreland, is despised by his parents because of his supposed lack of intelligence. Brought up at first by a foster-mother and then by his uncle, he develops great physical beauty together with a high degree of virtue and generosity. Like Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, he displays his kindly nature in the relief of the poor, sick and oppressed. Although the story lacks interest or probability so far as the incidents are concerned, it is of historical interest from the discourses it contains on the mystical aspects of Christianity, on the ideal form of education and on the discussions between the author and a "friend" on the various theories put forward in the book. The work breathes throughout the spirit of Rousseau and it played no small part in awakening men of the eighteenth century to the need for revolt against oppression and suffering.

John Wesley admired the book and obtained the author's permission to abridge it to about one-third of its original length and published it under a new title, *Henry, Earl of Moreland*, for use among his Methodists. A passionate lachrymose sensibility is displayed by the characters, whom the author—anticipating the Victorian tendency to over-simplification—divides into sheep and goats.

Belonging to the same school was Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), in which the hero is presented in a series of sentimental sketches loosely woven together, somewhat after the manner of Addison's *Sir Roger*. This book was one of Burns's bosom favourites and was included by Lydia Languish in her illicit library. Harley, "the man of feeling," is

a bashful sentimental youth, who after many adventures swoons to death on discovering, during an illness, that the lady he has long worshipped from afar returns his emotion. Mackenzie, seriously concerned with problems of the heart, wanted to free love and affection from the artificial inhibitions of society and to throw down the barriers raised by pride and wealth against the operation of goodwill. "Sensibility" was to be the solvent of the callous indifference to suffering so often manifested in the eighteenth century.

The Man of Feeling was followed in 1773 by *The Man of the World*, in which the hero is a villain and a seducer, and in 1777 by *Julia de Roubigne*, a novel after the manner of Richardson's *Clarissa*. At this stage in the development of the novel, women writers become important.

The craft of fiction had already attracted a large number of women writers, but the ladies of the Restoration and the Augustan Age had written as men, and taken up a masculine attitude to society. Now, for the first time, women writers began to present a feminine point of view.

The liveliest and most brilliant of the women writers before Jane Austen was Fanny Burney, a precocious girl whom Dr. Johnson petted and called his "little charactermonger." Frances Burney, born in 1752, was the daughter of Dr. Burney the historian of music, and she lived during her youth in the midst of that literary society which included Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke. She was a born writer, who showed a gift for literary caricature. One critic dubbed her a "Smollett in petticoats." She certainly had something of Smollett's inventiveness, his quick eye for the salient traits that betray character, and his exuberant delight in his art. But there the likeness ends, and her novels are entirely free from both his coarseness and his violence. She replaces picaresque adventures by the comedy of manners.

Fanny Burney had written and destroyed her first novel before she was fifteen, but many years later she revived the plot and used it as the basis for *Evelina* (1778). In many respects the conditions attending the publication of *Evelina* resembled those of *Jane Eyre* seventy years later. It was issued anonymously by a firm who did not know the name of the writer, and only the children of the household from which the book came knew its origin. Published under the title, *Evelina or A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, it

achieved an immediate success which gave the author, "a shrinking modest little body," a foremost place in the literary world of her day. Macaulay expressed a high opinion of the book: "*Evelina* was the first tale written by a woman, and purporting to be a picture of life and manners that lived or deserved to live. It took away reproach from the novel."

The story is told in the form of letters passing between the chief characters and contains many features that reappear in her subsequent novels. The main theme is concerned with the introduction of a beautiful and intelligent girl to London Society. Sir John Belmont contracts a marriage in France, but, disappointed of the fortune he hoped to receive, and alienated by the inexcusable rancour of the lady's family, burns the marriage certificate and denies that a marriage has taken place. The lady gives birth to a daughter, Evelina, who is brought up by her guardian, Mr. Villars. On a visit to London Evelina falls in love with the handsome and dignified Lord Orville, "the best of men," but is exposed to much annoyance by the reappearance of her vulgar French grandmother and the behaviour of an over-persistent lover, Sir Clement Willoughby. Eventually, Sir John Belmont is induced to recognize his daughter and a happy reconciliation ensues, and Evelina marries Lord Orville.

The charm of the novel lies in its freshness, and the natural spontaneity of the dialogue and observations. It abounds in clever portraits of recognizable types, and in the undeniable felicity with which the affairs of a young inexperienced girl are presented it opened up new fields for future novelists. A photographic memory for conversation as well as persons furnished Fanny Burney with inexhaustible material. Moreover, her characters talk like real people and the stilted, bookish idiom of Brooke and Mackenzie gave way to an easy feminine loquacity. Everyday topics were caught with an eye to exactness and charm. Sensitive herself, she mocked sentimentality, and brought out the comedy of snobbery that was beginning to usurp the social stage. In her awareness of the scope the domestic scene provided for a woman novelist lies her importance as a forerunner of Jane Austen.

In 1782 she published *Cecilia* or *The Memoirs of an Heiress*, a novel that was immediately successful. Cecilia Beverley inherits a large fortune on the sole condition that her husband must take her name. The characters are exquisite in their

sensibility and a happy ending is happily contrived. There are many admirably drawn subsidiary characters, notably the mischievous rattle, Lady Honoria Pemberton. The Hon. Compton Delville, a man of overweening family pride, "arrogant without merit, imperious without capacity," the father of the man with whom Cecilia falls in love, may have suggested some traits to Jane Austen for her study of D'Arcy in *Pride and Prejudice*.

A third novel, *Camilla*, or *a Picture of Youth*, appeared in 1796, after the shy Miss Burney (who married General D'Arblay, a French refugee in England), had learned to converse with royalty, having been appointed second keeper to the robes to Queen Charlotte in 1786. *Camilla* is concerned with the matrimonial adventures of a group of young people and contains some excellent comic situations and delightful satiric characterization. But her first book is her best, and together with her famous *Diary*, with its sketches of Johnson and Garrick, remains the best introduction to her work, and an enchanting picture of the times.

Miss Burney was the originator of the simple novel of home life as seen by a woman. She took as her theme the entry of a young and inexperienced girl into the world of fashion. The circumstances to which such a girl was exposed not only serve to reveal and to develop her character but provide the author with countless opportunities for a display of comic characterization and gentle satire at the expense of the vulgar."

The eighteenth-century novel—with varying standards of competency - continued to present contemporary portraits set neatly in fictitious stories, but behind the scenes a witch's brew was preparing. In 1760 Horace Walpole, the gilded dilettante son of the much abused Prime Minister, published *The Castle of Otranto*. So that in the same year that Johnson had uttered his large warning against too much submission to the caprice of Fancy, Walpole allowed the fantastic logic of the dream, and the intervention of the supernatural, to set at naught all the limits scrupulous common sense had imposed upon fiction. Within twenty years the seed Walpole so carelessly sowed was to produce a strange harvest.

Between this false dawn of Romanticism and the comfortable sunset glow of the Augustans one figure—whose fame has grown with the twentieth-century interest in Sur-

realism—occupied a special niche among minor writers. He was William Beckford (1759-1844), the author of *Vathek*. Beckford's own life was as fantastic as his story, and is perhaps the best commentary upon it.

Heir to vast wealth, amassed by his father's family in the West Indies, he also inherited from them his wilful disposition, his reckless daring and perhaps a touch of parvenu ostentation. His mother was a Hamilton, descended from the Earls of Abercorn, and from this side came the wit, the puckish irresponsible humour, the taste for baroque magnificence and the delight of the grand seigneur in everything rich and rare.

Born in 1759, Beckford was educated by private tutors. He studied music under Mozart, to whom he is said to have suggested the theme of *Non piu andrai*. As a youth his imagination was so precociously inflammable that Lord Chatham proscribed the Arabian Nights' Entertainments as too dangerous for one whose mind was all fire and air. But the ban availed little, as one of his tutors was Alexander Cozens, then romantically reputed to be the son of Peter the Great. He was in truth the son of a Deptford shipwright who went to Russia. But Cozens had been brought up in Russia and he fired Beckford's imagination with vision of Asiatic cities, rich in barbaric splendour and adorned with pinnacles, domes and minarets gleaming with gold and enamel. It is not surprising that the boy was enchanted and filled with dreams of an exotic Eastern world. Moreover, Beckford's mother, the "Begum" as he called her, had a poor opinion of English universities, so her son completed his education in Geneva, before going on the customary grand tour of Europe.

The novel which made Beckford famous was written in French, and, according to the author, at a single sitting of three days and two nights. The composition took, in fact, considerably longer. An English translation was prepared by Samuel Henley, and, revised by Beckford, was published in 1786. His other works included *The Elegant Enthusiast* (1796), a burlesque of the still fashionable sentimental novel, and *Azemia* (1797).

In these years Beckford's ruling passion was the glorification of his ancestral home of Fonthill—lying behind the western ramparts of Salisbury. There he established himself (like Scott at Abbotsford or, rather, more like Kubla Khan in fabulous Xanadu) and spent a fortune, having it rebuilt

nearer to the heart of Gothic desire with the architect James Wyatt, President of the Royal Academy, as his accomplice. Beckford planned to extend Fonthill wing by wing, adding corridors and chambers, until the strange edifice resembled some fantastic cathedral. A tower three hundred feet high was put up so hurriedly—for Beckford was wondrously impatient to see the masterpiece finished—that it collapsed. Beckford's only regret was that he had not seen it fall, and he ordered Wyatt to erect another. The second tower lasted twenty-four years, and then crashed as the first had done. On one occasion Wyatt switched five hundred workmen to Beckford's estate from one of the King's castles in order not to disappoint his impatient patron. In this extravaganza in stone, Beckford housed a huge library of twenty thousand books, many of them works on magic and occultism. There he shut himself up with a major-domo, a physician and a French abbe to live in perpetual adoration of *Il sacro egoismo*.

In 1822 when Beckford was forced to dispose of Fonthill—with its oriental apartments, Moorish carvings, orange groves and pleasaunces—the sale lasted thirty-seven days. The public were admitted, among them Hazlitt, who sourly condemned Beckford's creation as "a desert of magnificence, a glittering waste, a laborious idleness, a cathedral turned into a toy-shop." The author moved to Bath, to die in 1844 in his eighty-fifth year, showing scarcely a trace of age and declaring that although life was tired of him he was still far from tired of life.

Beckford, throughout his life, fed his voluptuous imagination on the seductive theories he found so much more exciting than fact. Magic and occultism, widely studied in France and Germany, were awakening great interest in England at the time, and the principles of Mesmerism were being discussed—the magnetic eye becoming almost a commonplace of the Romantics. Freemasonry flourished, and among other strange arts astrology had its devotees. It was the age of Cagliostro. More darkly inspired, certain perverted minds were turning to Satanism. Connoisseurs of the curious could peruse the novels of the Marquis de Sade. The "Monks of Medmenham" were committing their conscious crimes against the Holy Ghost; diabolism was in the air, and Beckford breathed in the accursed incense. Such were the background and enthusiasms of the man who wrote *Vathek*, as complete an anti-

thesis of the domestic fiction of Fanny Burney as can be imagined.

For this little gem of unrestrained fancy Beckford was chiefly indebted to his own imagination, but some literary sources can be indicated. As a boy he had read Galland's French translation of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, he was familiar with the adventures of Abdalla, son of Hanif, and the Mogul Tales of Gueulette. But what gives this oriental tale its strange actuality is Beckford himself. For the portrait of the Caliph he sat to himself.

The Caliph Vathek, grandson of Haroun-al Raschid, in his gorgeous palace with its five temples of the senses, in which every delight is present, entertains a hideous Giaour, who brings strange gifts. At first it seems that the story is going to be a lighthearted, merry oriental tale, iridescent and absurd as a peacock's feather. The Caliph, however, is interested in the darker side of magic and longs to discover the hidden secrets of nature. Under the influence of his sorceress mother, the Greek Carathis, an embodiment of evil curiosity, he becomes a servant of Eblis, the Devil. Vathek, like an oriental Faust is lured by the fatal Giaour to renounce Mahomet in return for the privilege of visiting the Palace of the Subterranean Fire, where he will behold the treasures of the pre-Adamite Sultans and the mystic talismans by which the world is ruled. To achieve this end the Giaour demands the sacrifice of fifty of the loveliest children in the kingdom. Even from this the Caliph does not shrink. His reward is a parchment with directions for the parilous journey to the infernal regions. After lengthy preparations the Caliph sets out accompanied by a gay, shimmering cavalcade. But on the third day a terrible storm rages. Scourged by tempests, maddened by hunger, and decimated by wild beasts, the tattered remnants of the once glorious retinue at last seek hospitality—in defiance of the Giaour prohibitions—with the good Emir Fakreddin. Here the forces of good make a final but unavailing effort to dissuade Vathek from his unholy quest, and so save his soul. But he repays the kindly Emir by stealing away his lovely daughter, Nouronihar, whom he infects with his own insane passion for forbidden knowledge. They come, eventually, to the portals of the Palace of Eblis or Satan, who rules this region of horror and death.

At this point in the story Beckford transcends his original

intention and we pass from the narration of various grotesque and extravagant incidents to a Dantesque vision of hell. Spread before the eyes of the now terrified Princes are the bitter fruits they have sold their souls to enjoy. Vathek discovers the vanity of his desires, for behind the treasures of the earth lie death, loathing, everlasting pain and hopelessness.

> ... a vast multitude was incessantly passing, who severally kept their right hands on their hearts, without once regarding anything around them; they all had the livid paleness of death. . . . They all avoided each other; and though surrounded by a multitude that no one could number, each wandered at random unheedful of the rest, as if alone on a desert island where no foot had trodden.

They meet the great Soliman Ben Daoud and learn from him his history and their own ghastly fate.

> "In my lifetime I filled a magnificent throne; having, in my right hand, twelve thousand seats of gold, where the patriarchs and the prophets heard my doctrines; on my left, the sages and doctors upon as many thrones of silver were present at all decisions. Whilst I thus administered justice to innumerable multitudes, the birds of the air, hovering over me, served as a canopy against the rays of the sun. My people flourished and my palaces rose to the clouds. I erected a temple to the Most High which was the wonder of the universe; but I basely suffered myself to be seduced by the love of women, a certain curiosity that could not be restrained by sublunary things. I listened to the counsels of Aherman and the daughter of Pharoah; and adored fire and the hosts of heaven. I forsook the holy city, and commanded the genii to rear the stupendous palace of Istakar, and the terrace of the watch-towers: each of which was consecrated to a star. There, for a while, I enjoyed myself in the zenith of glory and pleasure. Not only men but supernatural beings were subject to my will. I began to think, as these unhappy monarchs around had already thought, that the vengeance of Heaven was asleep; when, at once, the thunder burst my structures asunder, and precipitated me thither; where, however, I do not remain like the other inhabitants, totally destitute of hope; for an angel of light hath revealed that in consideration of the piety of my early youth my woes shall come to an end when this cataract shall for ever cease to flow. Till then I am in torments, ineffable torments! an unrelenting fire preys on my heart."

Having uttered this exclamation, Soliman raised his hands towards heaven, in token of supplication; and the Caliph discerned through his bosom, which was transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames.

Convulsed with horror and remorse, Vathek begs to be allowed to depart, but he soon learns that in this abode of vegeance and despair there is no mercy. At the appointed time the awful and irrevocable decree is announced : "Their hearts immediately took fire, and they, at once, lost the most precious gift of heaven—Hope."

Vathek is undoubtedly the best of the oriental tales. Fiction here is to have broken free from the predominant trend towards naturalism and asserted the supremacy of the imagination. Change was in the air. In France and in Germany the spirit of Romantic revolt that was to sweep through literature during the next two decades and leave it transformed was beginning to stir. The Gothic Terror was about to rage and for a time elegance, humour and restrained fancy would be dismissed from the realm of fiction.

CHAPTER 5

The Gothic Romances

THE ENGLISH Romantic movement, which found its supreme expression in poetry, was reflected in a somewhat cruder and more primitive manner in the novel, where it helped to inaugurate a new literary genre—the thriller. It was just four years after Dr. Johnson had won golden opinions for his balanced judgments on the human comedy in *Rasselas,* in which he had uttered his stern warning against unrestricted indulgence in fancy and imagination, that people were acclaiming with equal fervour *The Castle of Otranto.* In this, the first of the Terror novels, Horace Walpole turned the comedy into a lurid Gothic melodrama and invoked the other world to destroy the balance of this one.

The extraordinary change which took place in the last quarter of the eighteenth century is hard to define, for the Romantic movement was essentially complex and changes in sensibility had long been in progress. At the heart of the matter there was a profound reaction against the long domination of reason and authority. "By the middle of the century the classical enthusiasms, which in their day had been an inspiration to loveliness and had revitalized European taste had become set. The influence which had once restored self-respect and alertness to a culture flaccid and apathetic had become a cause of impotence. In the eternal swing from liberty to discipline and back again the pendulum of taste had arrived at the extreme limit of fastidious austerity. It paused, turned slowly on its tracks and then, swinging ever more rapidly towards luxuriance and freedom once again swept artists, writers and political philosophers into the seething excitement of a new romanticism.

For over a hundred years since the time of Descartes and the philosopher Hobbes imagination and fancy had been regarded with distrust. Reason and reality was strictly limited to what could be experienced by the senses. Gradually the old intellectual approach to life gave way to a wider outlook which admitted the claims of passion and emotion and accepted the sense of mystery in life. In literature, criticism and satire were replaced by a more creative spirit and wit by humour and pathos. The widespread admission that there was a

mystery in life that reason could not fathom led men to reject many of the ideas that had seemed commonplace to the Augustans and to welcome others that the Age of Reason would have frowned upon. Romantic souls preferred Rousseau's idea of natural goodness to Lord Chesterfield's chilling scepticism. Men began to warm to the notion that their kind were inherently noble and therefore capable of perfection once the social system which hampered the development of human beings was reformed or swept away.

A striking characteristic of the approach to the Romantic period was the strong interest shown in the past. It was a feeling that manifested itself in many branches of art and literature. And of all the various periods which the past had to offer, that which afforded the greatest satisfaction was the Middle Ages. It may be said that the renaissance of imagination was inspired above all by the literary and artistic rediscovery of the Middle Ages. It lived again as a period of faith, of picturesqueness, of simplicity, of pathos—in fact, of all the qualities lacking in the Age of Reason, at the heart of which was a tedium, and even a disgust, that led it to turn against itself.

The passionate idealization of the Middle Ages was brought about by mental faculties to which veracity of detail was irrelevant. The one main idea was that the past should differ from the present; the Middle Ages were hailed as a reality, once alive, and whose revived existence was now to be mysteriously interwoven with the life of the present. Closely associated with the spirit of wonder awakened by the Age of Faith was the revival of interest in magic and witchcraft. Men were obviously tired of being wholly reasonable. The new-found appreciation of Nature in her wild and savage aspects was yet another sign that a generation emotionally starved was beginning to seek inspiration in remoteness from familiar scenes and everyday life.

Extremely significant at this period was the unfeigned delight in "ruins." The convention of the "ruin" played a great part in creating a special atmosphere of awe and horror and of stimulating the emotion of fear constantly evoked by the poets of the "Churchyard" school of poetry and the Terror novelists. Ruins, especially when seen in half-lights, aroused a feeling of melancholy, a sense of the impermanence of human life and effort; there was an ineffable sadness in the

spectacle of an ivy-covered tower once the guard and fortress of a flourishing and vital system, now the haunt of owls. After so many decades devoted to praise of town life, to enjoyment of the brightly lit salon or the social coffee-house and the agreeable fatigues of conversation, men began deliberately to seek different sensations. They wanted to be alone, to give way to pleasurably melancholic musings as they wandered along some lonely strand or sat in the evening in an old churchyard or gazed out over a solitary moor. A special type of poetry, the elegiac and reflective, came into existence which sought to heighten the sensibilities and induce moods of contemplation and sombre sadness.

But melancholy soon gave way to the stronger emotion of fear. Fear acted as the powerful solvent of all that was rational in the eighteenth century, for fear reduced man to a condition of primitive helplessness and forced on him a complete revaluation of his universe. The stimulation of fear and the probing of the mysterious provided the *raison d'être* of the Gothic novelists, who took an important part in liberating the emotional energies that had been so long restrained by common sense and good form. By playing on the deep psycho-physical disturbances that occurred when man was confronted by the supernatural—the most terrifying of all experiences—they provided new thrill. At the same time they prepared the way for the true Romantics. The fine flowering of Romantic sensibility took place in soil which had been cultivated by these novelists. For there was a strange link connecting the crude sensationalism of *The Monk* and Wordsworth's lofty conception of the part played by nature in educating the soul.

The philosophical and political implications of this strange taste have been discussed by Michael Sadleir in his essay on the Gothic romance in *Things Past*.

> A ruin expresses the triumph of chaos over order, and the Gothistic movement was, in origin at least, a movement toward freedom and away from the controls of discipline. Creepers and weeds, asyear by year they riot over sill and paving-stone, defy a broken despotism; every coping-stone which crashes from a castle-battlement into the undergrowth beneath is a small victory for liberty, a snap of the fingers in the face of autocratic power. Indeed, in these early enthusiasms of the Gothistic pioneers may

clearly be seen the impulses which, politically, expressed themselves in the French Revolution.

Although the discovery of terror as a source of pleasurable emotion was not completed until the end of the eighteenth century, there are various indications that the subject had already aroused the interest of writers. In 1773 an essay appeared *On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror*, and another entitled *An Enquiry into those kinds of Distress which excite Agreeable Sensations*. But in fact the literary reign of terror was actually inaugurated by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Walpole believed that the scope of naturalism in fiction had been exhausted by Richardson and if the novel was to survive it must be revitalized from other sources. In spite of the keen interest inspired by the Middle Ages a return to the native adventure stories that amused the age of Caxton was out of the question. Yet there were possibilities in a type of romance that should combine the new realism with the old freedom of imagination. The result in Walpole's hands was a good-humoured essay in fiction that obtained its effects by a very mild use of the supernatural, but which twenty years later was to inspire a series of novels harrowing in their sensationalism.

Having written a novel in a new genre, Walpole was uncertain of its reception, and so he enshrouded the original publication in mystery. He pretended that the work, printed in Naples in the black letter in 1529, was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. He went so far as to suggest that the Spanish names of the domestics indicated that the work was not composed until the establishment of the Arragonian kings in Naples had made the Spanish appellations familiar in that country.

After the success of the first edition he added a preface to the second admitting the authorship.

> The favourable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he composed it. But before he opens those motives, it is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt, were the sole inducements to assume that disguise he flatters himself that

> he shall appear excusable. He resigned his performance to the impartial judgment of the public ; determined to let it perish in obscurity, if disapproved ; not meaning to avow such a trifle, unless better judges should pronounce that he might own it without a blush.

Walpole explained that his object was to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern, so that the best of each might be retained in a fiction at once new and exciting. The old romances had suffered from their inherent improbabilities, while the modern novel was cramped by too strict an adherence to everyday life. In the *Castle of Otranto* he congratulated himself he had reconciled the two.

The starting-point of the tale was a dream. One night Walpole had a queer dream in which the hall staircase of his pseudo-Gothic Strawberry Hill was blended into memories of an ancient college at Cambridge and suddenly a gigantic hand in armour appeared on the banister. This apparition provided him with his central theme. Manfred, Prince of Otranto, is the grandson of the usurper of the realm, who in his day had poisoned the rightful lord, the good Alfonso. A prophecy existed which declared that the line of the usurper should continue to reign until the rightful owner had grown too large to inhabit the castle and as long as the male issue of the usurper remained.

When the story opens Manfred is about to marry his only son Conrad, a sickly boy, to the beautiful Isabella of Vicenza. But on the eve of the wedding a gigantic helmet falls mysteriously and dashes the boy to pieces, burying him under a mountain of sable plumes. Terrified by this omen, and fearing to be left without male descendants, Manfred resolves to divorce his wife and marry Isabella himself. After several attempts to force Isabella to yield to him Manfred is frustrated when she escapes from the castle by means of a subterranean passage, assisted in her flight by a young peasant, Theodore, who bears a remarkable likeness to the old Duke Alfonso. The climax of horror in the story is reached when Manfred learns that a lady from the castle and Theodore have met by night at the tomb of Alfonso. Maddened by jealousy and frustrated passion, Manfred hastens to the tomb, sees the guilty pair, and stabs the lady, only to find that she is his own daughter, Matilda. From that moment onward the

supernatural element which has dominated the story now brings it to a close. The ghost of Alfonso, who has been haunting the castle and is responsible for the mysterious happenings, forces Manfred to confess his crime, and the rightful heir, who turns out to be Theodore, is restored and marries Isabella. The usurper and his much-wronged wife retire from the world.

Walpole uses the supernatural element lightly; servants are frightened by mysterious appearances and strange noises; the shadow of a gigantic apparition plays perpetually over the castle. On one occasion when Manfred tries to force Isabella to accept him "the portrait of his grandfather which hung over the bench where they had been sitting uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast" and a little later "quit its panel and descended on the floor with a grave and melancholy air." The absurdity and unnaturalness of the dialogue, especially at dramatic moments, can be appreciated from the following brief extract, which occurs when Manfred has surprised the lovers at the tomb:

> "Does it, alas! depend on me? Manfred will never permit our union."
>
> "No, this shall prevent!" cried the tyrant, drawing his dagger, and plunging it over her shoulder into the bosom of the person that spoke.
>
> "Ah me, I am slain!" cried Matilda, sinking: "good Heaven, receive my soul!"
>
> "Savage, inhuman monster, what hast thou done?" cried Theodore, rushing on him and wrenching his dagger from him.
>
> "Stop, stop thy impious hand!" cried Matilda, "it is my father."

In spite of spectres and noises and secret passages and the paraphernalia of terror the *Castle of Otranto* is totally devoid of atmosphere, and the effect is amusing rather than frightening. No attempt is made to suit the language to the supposed period of composition and the style is stilted and often ridiculous. But the book was widely read and enjoyed. Perhaps it was accepted in the same spirit of indulgence as its author's architectural extravaganza Strawberry Hill – the eccentric caprice of a man wealthy enough to give rein to his humours. Yet Walpole was undoubtedly right in

recognizing a public demand for more imagination and emotional freedom in creative literature. Within a generation the limitations of the merely possible were to give way to a riotous excess of fancy.

In spite of the success of Walpole's novel no one wrote a sequel to it until Clara Reeve published *The Champion of Virtue, A Gothic Tale,* in 1777. With this novel, better known by its subsequent title, *The Old English Baron,* the vogue for Gothic romances started in earnest.

Clara Reeve, although a disciple of Walpole, was not uncritical of his faults. She disliked the wildly fantastic and her avowed aim was "a sufficient degree of the marvellous to excite attention; enough of the manners of real life to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic to engage the heart on its behalf." *The Old English Baron* was concerned with the recovery of the rights of primogeniture by the son of a baron who has been brought up in ignorance of his high birth. The only concession made to the taste for supernatural happenings is the sporadic appearance of the ghost of the murdered baron. Miss Reeve tells her mildly exciting story competently, but only an occasional archaism disturbs the polish eighteenth-century style in which her medieval story is written. *The Old English Baron* is typical early Romantic Gothic and had many immitators.

Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), who followed Clara Reeve as a writer of Gothic "thrillers," exercised a more important influence on literature. Her novel represents the best phase of Terror fiction before it became debased by the cult of ghastliness started in imitation of the German school. All the young Romantics adored Mrs. Radcliffe. Shelley's tastes in natural scenery were formed by her impassioned descriptions of the Apennines. Byron derived from her novels the models for his impetuous Lara, his defiant Manfred and his sinister Giaour. She herself was an admirer of the painter Salvator Rosa, and translated into another medium the effects he achieved with his brush. The little figures of *banditti* which appear as dacorative details in his wild landscapes came to life and assumed gigantic proportions in her stories.

Mrs. Radcliffe possessed a highly romantic temperament, an intense love of all that was beautiful, a passion for the mysterious and a taste for solitude that had been fostered

during a lonely girlhood passed among elderly people. Her interest in the supernatural and the weird was strong, but always controlled by reason. She was too restrained and idealistic to exploit the purely horrible. Instead she specialized in studies of the psychology of fear when it is aroused by happenings that are only apparently supernatural. She rationalized terror and excelled in creating atmosphere and in describing the more awe-inspiring aspects of nature.

Her first important novel, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), was distinguished by a picturesque setting of romantic decay which soon became an inseparable part of every story she wrote. The horror in *A Sicilian Romance* is aroused partly by the atmosphere of uneasy strangeness and partly by the pathetic history of the lady who is immured in the depths of a vast castle by her dissolute husband so that he can pursue an intrigue with a younger and more beautiful woman. There is no violent action but a clever exploitation of the vague fears awakened in a sensititive nature by its exposure to the apparently inexplicable.

The Romance of the Forest (1791) revealed how completely Mrs. Radcliffe had surrendered to the spell of Alpine scenery. Descriptions of mountains are tediously prolonged and there is a suggested anticipation of Wordsworth in her belief that magnificent landscapes exercise an influence over the human mind. Natural grandeur and sublimity, thundering torrents, flaming sunsets and sable shadows played their part in heightening sensibility and provided the right setting for strange and terrible experiences.

Mrs. Radcliffe's finest work, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, appeared in 1794. This novel enjoyed a wide fame and was followed by scores of imitations. The story which is set in the sixteenth century, opens with a delightful account of the house of the St. Auberts in Gascony, where the orphaned Emily St. Aubert loses her heart to Valancourt, a young man of good family but moderate means. in the first part of the story the descriptions of natural scenery have a lyrical grace and charm. Soon, however, the scene changes to a gloomy Gothic castle perched on a precipitous cliff edge in the Apennies. Thither Emily is carried by her guardian, who is married to a sinister Italian Signor Montoni. Here, with all the apparatus of sliding panels, secret passages, abductions

and suggestions of the supernatural, dark dealings are carried on. For Montoni, in truth, is the head of a robber band and the castle is his lair.

Mrs. Radcliffe's castles have all the required eighteenth century air of decay and dissolution, but the settings are invariably magnificent.

> Towards the close of day the road wound into a deep valley. Mountains, whose shaggy steeps appeared to be inaccessible, almost surrounded it. To the east a vista opened and exhibited the Apennines in their darkest horrors; and the long perspective of retiring summits rising over each other, their ridges clothed with pines, exhibited a stronger image of grandeur than any that Emily had yet seen. The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains she was descending, whose long shadow stretched athwart the valley; but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest that hung upon the opposite side, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. . . . Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy sublime object. As she gazed the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity; and Emily continued to gaze, till the clustering towers were alone seen riding over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.

Once she had created an atmosphere of mystery and horror Mrs. Radcliffe proceeded to administer shock after shock until the agonized nerves (of her generation) could bear no more. But when the shock has told she discloses that it was due to mere trickery. Those mysterious intimations that had terrorized the persons in the novel and perturbed the reader are shown to be entirely natural in origin.

An excellent example of this particular technique is found in the description of the picture covered by a heavy black veil which arouses terror in Emily. Here is the passage:

> Her imagination was pleased with the view of ancient grandeur, and an emotion of melancholy awe awakened all its powers, as she walked through rooms obscure and desolate, where no foot-steps had passed probably for many years, and remembered the strange history of the former possessor of the edifice. This brought to her recollection the veiled picture which had attracted her curiosity on the preceding night, and she resolved to examine it. As she passed through the chambers that led to this, she found herself somewhat agitated; its connexion with the late lady of the castle, and the conversion with Annette, together with the circumstances of the veil, throwing a mystery over the object that excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object from which we appear to shrink. Emily passed on with faltering steps; and having paused a moment at the door before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then with a timid hand lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture: and before she could leave the chamber she dropped senseless on the floor.

Only when the full horror of this situation has been realized and the imagination has been kept on the rack for many pages does Mrs. Radcliffe disclose the fact that the veil conceals nothing more gruesome than a waxen image of a corpse set up as a kind of *memento mori* executed with that clinical realism that characterizes the Italian masters in wax. Admittedly it is horrible, but it owes nothing to the supernatural. Unlike the later writers of the Terror school, Mrs. Radcliffe always rationalized fear and she was especially skilled in evoking the sense of terror created by mysterious sound which are ultimately found to have a purely natural origin.

Her next novel, however, revealed an interesting change in public taste. It is clear in *The Italian, or the Confessional of The Black Penitent* (1797), that the appetite for horror stories was growing and that stronger stimuli were needed to

arouse the agreeable sensation of fear. There was another reason for the change in tone. A formidable rival to Mrs. Radcliffe had appeared in Matthew Gregory Lewis, who, in 1795, published *The Monk*, a mixture of the supernatural and the horrible. Undoubtedly Lewis's Tussaud monastic, Ambrosio, inspired Mrs. Radcliffe's Schedoni.

In *The Italian* the lovely orphan Ellena di Rosalba is loved by the only son of a marquess, but his mother opposes the match and resolves to crush his schemes to marry the girl. She finds a willing accomplice in her father confessor Schedoni. The choice of a Catholic priest as the satanic villain is deliberate and interesting. Anti-clerical feelings had been stirrred up during the French Revolution and on the continent the Church was regarded as the great enemy of Freemasonry, which had played so important a part in preparing the way for political freedom. To the Protestant mind the chief source of mysterious crime was to be found in the Spanish and Italian Inquisition. It was very easy to arouse a collective emotional complex of fear in English readers by hinting at the sinister interests of Rome. Schedoni is a monk of unknown origin, but suspected to be of exalted birth and decayed fortunes. He surrounds himself with a romantic aura of mystery. He maintains a severe reserve and unconquerable silence, is a lover of solitude and imposes on himself frequent penances. The latter are regarded as the punishment for some hideous crime which troubles his conscience.

Byron's debt to Schedoni was obvious, for the monk was clearly the prototype of the poet's satanic heroes. Like them, he was a "fatal man," half angel, half devil, perpetually torn by the conflicting forces of passion and remorse. His appearance excites terror.

> His figure was striking . . . it was tall and though extremely thin his limbs were large and uncouth, and as he stalked along wrapt in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in its air; something almost superhuman . . . His was not the melancholy of a sensible and wounded heart, but apparently that of a gloomy and ferocious disposition. His face bore the traces of many passions which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance, and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate at a single glance into the hearts of men, and to read their inmost thoughts;

few persons could support their scrutiny or even endure to meet them twice.

In this description of Schedoni there were traits that recur constantly in the "fatal men" of the Romantics, became stereotyped by the women novelists of a later generation and still animate the heroes of sensational novelettes. Chief among these characteristics were mysterious origins, traces of burnt-out passions, melancholy, suspicion of ghastly guilt and, above all, the unforgettable eyes. This last feature was described so often in the fiction of the period that it is impossible not to relate it to the prevalent interest in Mesmerism. Strangely enough, the magnetic eye of devastating power was not only a stage property of the Romantic novelists but an indisputable possession of their poets, if portraits and biographers are to be believed.

The debt of fiction to Mrs. Radcliffe was immense and her popularity was enormous. She excelled in natural description; her power to create atmosphere was at that time masterly; she might indeed be said to have been the first to introduce scenery for its own sake into the novel. But she made no attempt to convey an historically realistic picture, and although her novels are set in the past she is content to use the language of a sensitive and cultivated eighteenth-century writer. In any case realism was hardly to be expected of an author who was entirely unfamiliar with the ways of the people she described. Her ideas of monastic life bear vivid witness to Protestant naiveté, while her condottieri, banditti, inquisitors and the rest owe everything to imagination. She had never experienced violence of any kind and it is not surprising that to a modern reader her threats and daggers are too literary to carry much conviction. But they satisfied an age that had surrendered its credibility to German Romanticism, with its goblins, Gothic castles, haunted forests and other bewitching improbabilities.

At the turn of the century readers were eager to shiver, and required little more of their thrillers than that they should provide the pleasantly painful stimulation of synthetic fear. In the words of Michael Sadleir they

> listen gleefully to the hurricane without; they even peep between the shutters at the storm or rush into the rain and back again; but all the time they know themselves for safe,

> and whether they play at running risks of physical catastrophe or of moral degradation, they enjoy the game because it is a game.

Such readers were too unsophisticated to demand the illusion of reality.

The magical incantation of Mrs. Radcliffe's prose as she conjured up visions of cliffs, waving woods, sunsets, picturesque ruins and wild seascapes enchanted readers who had not time to become surfeited with "local colour." She can be said, in some ways, to have widened the range of sensibility to nature in its more awe-inspiring moods, so that after her no writer of Terror fiction could afford to ignore the powerful spells cast by gloomy woods, elusive sounds, midnight and mouldering decay.

For the next ten years the tide of Gothic romances was unstemmed. Curious readers will find hundreds of these novels catalogued in Montague Summers' *The Gothic Quest*, which contains as complete a bibliography of the thrillers of our ancestors as the most exacting student of the horrible could wish. The seed sown so innocently by Horace Walpole thirty years before produced a fruitful harvest. Such alluring titles as *Clermont, Castle of Wolfenbach, The Mysterious Warning, The Necromancer or the Tale of the Black Forest, The Midnight Bell, The Orphan of the Rhine* and *Horrid Mysteries* adorned the library lists of thriller addicts.

Some of the Gothic romancas still continued to represent the first phase of the movement inspired by Clara Reeve and allied the mildly horrific to rhapsodical sentimentality; others revealed the moderating influence of Mrs. Radcliffe and rationalized terror; but a third and by far the most important group either pretended to be translations from the German or actually were so. These latter exploited to the full the supernatural and revelled in horrors of the most bloodthirsty kind.

Horrid Mysteries, which delighted Isabella Thorpe in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, was the best example of a genuine translation. Published in 1796, it was a translation of the so-called *Memoirs of the Marquis of Grosse*, and described the adventures of the hero in his struggle against the intrigues of an international sect of Illuminati—social anarchists—who deny all civic responsibility, repudiate the ties of family, aim at the communization of women and

wealth, and have as their avowed objects assassination and the spread of anarchy.

Horrid Mysteries dealt unashamedly in the supernatural and occult power. From now on restraint is thrown aside and a veritable witches' sabbath is celeberated English fiction.

It was Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818) who turned the balance in favour of uncontrolled ghastliness. Born in 1775 and educated at Westminster School and Christ Church Oxford, Lewis prepared for a career in the Diplomatic Service. He learned German, met Goethe and read Schiller, forming an instant liking for the latter's *Die Räuber*. Lewis translated freely from what he read and absorbed the disordered supernaturalism of the German Romantic movement which was more lurid and primitive than the English version. The German Romantics who specialized in vampires, pacts with the Devil, the mystique of Rosicrucianism, elixirs and magic talismans also sponsored a widespread belief in the international intrigues of the Illuminati. Under these influences a morbid streak in Lewis's imagination appeared; he too trafficked with ghosts and demons, became a pray to devil-worship and allowed elements from the current literature of sadism to creep into his work, and moreover he introduced a note of voluptuous eroticism common enough in his German originals but hitherto unknown in English fiction. Lewis's attitude to the supernatural was altogether different from that of Mrs. Radcliffe—he was apparently no agnostic, but a wholehearted believer.

The Monk, published in 1795, tells the story of Ambrosio, the saintly Superior of the Capuchins of Madrid, who is corrupted by a demon woman, a vampire, who entering the monastery disguised as a young novice, wins Ambrosio's affections. She is in fact an emissary of Satan sent to ensnare the monk and destroy him body and soul. Ambrosio, a man of fundamentally strong passions whose lust has been made boundless by restraint, becomes depraved by the desires she arouses, and committs the foulest crimes under her influence. He is enamoured of one of his penitents and pursues his object with the help of magic and murder, finally killing the girl herself in an attempt to escape detection. Discovered at last by the Inquisition, he is tortured and sentenced to death, but under the guidance of his demon mistress he is persuaded to sell his soul to the Devil as the price of his escape from the *auto-da-fé*. He fails, however, to stipulate

for more than release from prison, and the fiend carries him to the top of a high mountain. "Whither have you brought me?" said the monk at last, in a hollow voice. The fiend recited a horrible catalogue of Ambrosio's crimes and then addressed him thus:

> "Tremble, abandoned hypocrite, inhuman patricide incestuous ravisher! . . . You trusted that you should still have time for repentance, I saw your artifice knew its falsity, and rejoiced in deceiving the deceiver! You are mine beyond reprieve; I burn to possess my right, and alive you quit not these mountains." . . . On hearing his sentence dreadful were the feelings of the devoted wretch. He sank upon his knees and raised his hands towards heaven. The fiend read his intention and prevented it. "What?" he cried, darting at him a look of fury; "dare you still implore the Eternal's mercy? Would you feign penitence, and again act the hypocrite's part? Villain! resign your hopes of pardon. Thus I secure my prey," and then, darting his talons in the monk's shaven crown, he sprang with him from the rock. The caves and mountains rang with Ambrosio's shrieks. The demon continued to soar aloft till, reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer. Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of rock received him, and he rolled from precipice to precipice till, bruised and mangled, he rested on the river's brink.

The Monk, written in ten weeks by Lewis before he had reached the age of twenty, is a sort of classic in its particular kind. The whole unwieldy machinery of horror is employed: unfaithful monks, clandestine meetings, sulphurous flames: unearthly music accompanying demon apparitions, spells poison, courtship in a coffin, and compacts with hell. It is melodrama epitomized. Lewis strove to get effects by portraying physical horror, but in painting his grim pictures he threw aside the restraint which made the work of Mrs. Radcliffe so telling. This type of book degenerated later into the "Penny Dreadful," but it was also the precursor of the works of Bram Stoker, M. R. James, R. H. Benson and the rest— a muster of more effective, if not more vigorous, necromancers.

Encouraged by the German stories he read, Lewis omitted nothing that might heighten the horror of the narattive, and readers approved the devil's brew and the book enjoyed a considerable success. Twelve months later an injunction to restrain its sales on account of objectionable passages was

obtained in the courts. The author revised and republished the work and its popularity remained undiminished. *The Monk* in its turn influenced the German Terror novelists, who then went far beyond Lewis in their description of erotic episodes. It was this element in the Gothic romances, however, that drew down the wrath of the moralists upon them and was finally responsible for their banishment from the libraries of the more cultivated.

A new twist was given to Terror fiction by Charles Brockden Brown, one of the earliest American novelists, who added to the prevailing taste for physical horror an interest in mental abnormality. His most powerful novel, *Wieland* (1798), was based upon the true story of a religious fanatic. Although only mediocre novelist, Brown had some skill in understanding psychology and was endowed with a lively curiosity into a unusual states of mind. His work lies outside the scope of this book, but it is worth remarking that Shelley was attracted by his novels and under his influence wrote two Gothic romances, *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvynne, or The Rosicrucian* (1811). Both tales are primitive in their conception of the horrific, which is chiefly confined to scenes of people weltering in purple gore or ringed with the blue-fire of devil worship.

More lasting in effect was the influence of Brown on Mary Shelley in her pseudo-scientific thriller *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Frankenstein, a Genevan student of natural philosophy, learns the secret of imparting life to inanimate matter. He collects bones from a charnel house, constructs the semblance of a human being and gives it life. This creature, endowed with superhuman size and strength, is nevertheless hideous and inspires loathing where-ever it goes. Finally filled with hatred for its creator, the monstor runs amok, killing Frankenstein's brother and his bride. Frankenstein pursues it to the Arctic regions in order to destroy it, but is himself murdered by the monster, which then vanishes. Inspired by the philosophy of her father William Godwin, Mary Shelley clearly intended the monster to be understood as an embodiment of the evil in man for which his Creator cannot escape responsibility.

It was, howevar, not until the craze for Terror fiction had died away that the masterpiece in this particular genre, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), was produced. For nearly

twenty years the healthy imagination of Walter Scott and his splendid gifts of historical realism had been directed to improving taste in fiction and guiding it into less sensational channels. So that when *Melmoth the Wanderer* appeared it failed to attract more than passing attention, languished and was soon forgotten except by professed students of Terror stories. Edgar Allen Poe and the French Romanticists were responsible for awakening interest in it some years later.

Charles Maturin (1782-1824) became a clergyman while still preserving his reputation for being an entertaining fop of histrionic habits who reconciled a fondness for society with a penchant for day-dreaming. He was widely read in Terror fiction and wrote several tales himself—*The Fatal Revenge, or The Family of Montorio* (1807), *The Wild Irish Boy* (1808) and *The Milesian Chief* (1811). For a time Maturin turned to the drama and achieved a success with a tregedy *Bertram*, which was produced at the Drury Lane. Then in 1818 he returned to novel-writing and published *Woman, Pour et Contre* (1818), a powerful story of the rivalry of a mother and daughter who both fall in love with the same man. His excellence as a novelist lay in his power of construction and his skill in selecting incidents.

Maturin was particularly fascinated by the struggle of passion when the soul trembled on the verge of the unlawful and the unhallowed. And like his contemporary the Marquis de Sade he was especially interested in the nature of suffering and its power to arouse pleasurable sensations.

> It is actually possible to become amateurs in suffering. I have heard of men who have travelled into countries where horrible executions were to be witnessed for the sake of that excitement which the sight of suffering never fails to give, from the spectacle of a tragedy, or an *auto-da-fe*, down to the writhings of the meanest reptiles on whom you can inflict torture, and feel that torture is the result of your own power. It is triumph over those whose sufferings have placed them below us, and no wonder—suffering is always an indication of weakness—we glory in our impenetrability. . . . You will call this cruelty, I call it curiosity—that curiosity that brings thousands to witness a tragedy and makes the most delicate heart feast on groans and agonies.

Melmoth the Wanderer skilfully blends together the legends of Faust, Mephistopheles and the Wandering Jew and

tells the story of how John Melmoth, in the seventeenth century, sold his soul to the Devil in return for prolonged life. The novel opens with a fine realistic description of a contemporary Irish scene which throws into sharp relief the supernaturalism of the episodes. In a decayed country house, framed by sinister dwarfish trees, an old miser lies dying surrounded by feckless domestics and superstitious crones. By his bedside is his young nephew, John Melmoth, to whom he bequeaths a legacy of horror by confiding to him that the ancestor whose menacing portrait is hidden in a closet and dated 1646 is still living. Within this framework the story is unfolded in six episodes which are broken off abruptly and possess the compelling fatality of a nightmare.

The John Melmoth who was born at the beginning of the seventeeth century, led by boundless aspiration to acquire forbidden knowledge, entered into a pact with the Devil by which his life was to be prolonged for a hundred and fifty years, during which time he was to have the power of passing through solid substances, to paralyse a mob with a wave of the hand and to make himself invisible at will. In exchange for this barren endowment he sells his soul to Satan and becomes an agent seeking fresh victims for his master. An original point in the story is that Melmoth can transfer his gift of life to any who will change places with him.

Maturin rejected the blood-curdling paraphernalia of the Terror convention and concentrated his imagination on the psychological possibilities of the story. By blending myths that were deeply rooted in the human consciousness he was able to touch powerful centres of fear. Melmoth wanders for more than a hundred years from country to country, spreading terror with his eyes—eyes that no one would wish ever to have seen, for, once seen, it was impossible to forget them. Whenever a man or woman is reduced to desperation Melmoth appears with his offer of relief from distress. He explores the prisons, the frightful dungeons of the Inquisition, the houses of the wretched, even the asylums, but his quest is unavailing; not even to be saved from the utmost agony will any accept his accursed gift. His quest ended, the Wanderer returns to his home in Ireland and after a premonitory dream of hell spends a final night of horror struggling like Faust with the superhuman powers that come to claim him. He is carried off by the Fiend and in the morning only a handkerchief

caught on a perilous rock overhanging the engulfing ocean remains as the last visible trace of the Wanderer.

The novel abounds in frightful descriptions of torture, both physical and mental, and at times achieves a touch of surrealism in its savage aesthetic of the "beauty of the horrible." But the episode in which Maturin best succeeds in creating a Websterian atmosphere of inescapable horror is that in which the Englishman Stanton appears. Here a sane man is put into a madhouse and in order to impress his guard behaves with docility. But nothing saves him from his fate, left in a haunt of madmen where the walls echo to the shrieks of the insane and the furious lashing of the whips that hold them in control. Stanton begins to fear for his reason when Melmoth appears to him, saying, "I never desert my friends in misfortune, when they are plunged in the lowest abyss of human calamity they are sure to be visited by me." He offers Stanton his dreadful bargain and to tempt him to accept it draws a horrifying picture of the spectacle of madness slowly destroying a healthy mind : ' You will wish to become one of them to escape the agony of consciousness." Fear of insanity is the keynote of Stanton's narrative and it grips the reader's imagination by its concentrated force and suggestiveness, by the selection of harrowing detail and the realism with which frenzy is presented.

So fantastic a creation as the novel of Terror invited the art of satirist and parodist. As early as 1796 William Beckford burlesqued the rhapsodical romance in *Modern Novel Writing, or The Elegant Enthusiast*, and repeated the performance in *Azemia* (1797). Thomas Love Peacock wrote an immortal skit on the moral anarchy condoned by a thoroughgoing diabolism of the type described in *Horrid Mysteries*, while E.S. Barret administered the *coup de grâce* in *The Heroine* (1813), an extravagant parody of all the absurdities committed by this school of fiction-writers. Jane Austen, in *Northanger Abbey*, provided a large pinch of Attic salt for those readers who wished to take their magic lightly. Terror after a reign of sixty years gave way at length to a healthier if less exciting fiction concerned with real life. In the words of Michael Sadleir :

> The Gothic novel crashed and became the vulgar "blood." But if the once despot of the boudoir became the servant of the chapmaker in the slums of Seven Dials; if *The Children*

of the Abbey, The Romance of the Pyrenees, The Bravo of Bohemia, and all the rest sank from the drawing-room floor to the sourest recesses of the basement—the sprit of melodrama and terror (which is only in rousing guise the spirit of escape) persisted unsubdued and persists to this day. Thus at any stage between 1820 and to-day may be found flourishing, in one form or another, the tradition that once was Regina Roche, that was to become Edgar Wallace and Dennis Wheatley and Sydney Horler. Analyse any one of the sensational novels popular during the last hundred years, and you will find that it represents precisely that blend of recognizable probability and delicious threatening horror, which characterized the romances of the Gothistic period and gave them a supremacy over educated folk, many of whom knew better.

Throughout the Gothic period another type of fiction began to establish itself—the doctrinaire novel that was to prove highly congenial to the English, with their taste for didacticism. Certain writers, no longer content merely to set down their observations on life, seized on fiction as a means of presenting, in an attractive guise, a particular point of view or a criticism of society. Few of these didactic writers—Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Opie, Dr. Moore, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage and William Godwin—who composed their frigid tracts for the time, are likely to be read for pleasure today. Yet some of them are not without interest in so far as they reveal the sympathies of the "advanced" novelist with the underdog of the time and a general concern with social problems.

Robert Bage (1728-1801), a papermaker by trade, started to write novels after the failure of his business. Philosophically considered, Bage was a materialist and his books are notable for their shrewdly satiric pictures of contemporary society. The commercial and industrial classes were no longer held in awe by the "Quality," and criticism of the profligacy and heartlessness of a corrupt aristocracy was widespread. The misty halo that surrounded the middle class in the days of Bunyan was hardening into a ring of pure gold.

Man as he Is (1792), a clever satire on society, was followed in 1796 by *Hearmsprong, or Man as he is Not,* a story, which owes a great deal to Rousseau, of a "natural" man brought up in ignorance of what constitutes morals and religion in Western society. Hermsprong's teachers are North American savages, who subject him to a Spartan règime. But his training leaves him physically hard and morally incor-

ruptible, with a respect for virtue and sincerity and standards of honesty more often praised than employed in the West. Like Oroonoko, an earlier romanticized savage, he enjoys the advantages of education and has read Rousseau and Voltaire. Introduced into English society, he is quick to perceive and resent the hypocrisy he finds there, and he condemns the pretences by which conservatives defend their reactionary tendencies. Had Bage accepted the logic of his own conclusions Hermsprong's criticism of society would have required the advocacy of communism. But he was satisfied to ventilate grievances and shrank from offering any solution of the problems raised by contemporary depravity.

Mrs. Parsons, who achieved a considerable contemporary reputation as an author of Gothic romances, showed her cynical and lively wit in two entertaining counterparts to Bage's satires on men in *Woman as She Should Be* (1793), and *Women as They Are* (1796).

But the most famous of the doctrinaire novelists was the philosopher William Godwin (1756-1836), the most influential thinker of his generation and one whose championship of individualism caused him to be stigmatized as an anarchist. Godwin started his career as a Dissenting Minister, but became a rationalist and a radical. He believed that men acted according to reason and that once rationally persuaded a course of action was right it was impossible not to follow it. Reason taught men to act benevolently towards each other so that rational creatures could live in harmony without laws and institutions. The later when irrational were, in fact, the actual cause of evil.

Godwin expressed his philosophical views in the famous *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), but he realized the need to relate his radical teaching more closely to the daily life of the community. His object was to portray "things as they are," and in order to embody them in a concrete form that should be understandable by the majority he turned to the popular novel form and wrote *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). The book enjoyed an astounding success and won even greater fame than *Political Justice*, raising its author, in the opinion of his contemporaries, to the highest rank among imaginative writers. *Caleb Williams* vibrated with the restless spirit of the time and Godwin himself said "that it may perhaps be considered as affording no inadequate image

of the fervour of my spirit; it was the offspring of that temper of mine which the composition of my *Political Justice* left me."

Godwin left an elaborate account of the manner in which he conceived and constructed the plot of *Caleb Williams*, a novel in which propaganda was allied to the study of crime and detection. Like most of the novels of the period, it was written for publication in three volumes, but the construction reverses the chronological order of the books. Godwin planned the third of these first, with the central character, the fugitive, in perpetual apprehension of being overwhelmed with the worst calamities, and then went on in the second to construct a situation that would account for the relentless pursuit, and finally in the first volume he delineated the circumstances of the original crime which brought into play the series of events in the other volumes. The novel was designed to show "the tyranny and perfidiousness exercised by the powerful members of the community against those who are less privileged than themselves." It became a sustained attack on arbitrary government and the blind cruelty of the laws and a "general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer."

The story opens with the feud between Tyrrel, a coarse boor, and Falkland, a cultured man who has imbibed the "poison of chivalry," in the course of which Falkland murders Tyrrel under provocation and allows two innocent yeomen to be hanged in his place. Caleb Williams, the self-educated son of humble parents, becomes secretary to Falkland, and by chance discovers the secret, but is kept silent by the threats of his master. For a time Williams is wrongly imprisoned on a trumped-up charge, and after his release joins a gang of thieves, whose good qualities are used by Godwin to accentuate the corruption of so-called law-abiding society. Williams enjoys a brief respite, but is soon hunted down by Falkland's agents and finally, driven to desperation, lays a charge of murder against his former employer. In the last dramatic scene Falkland, who is dying, is brought face to face with Williams, and, won by the generosity and sincerity of the man he has persecuted, makes a confession of his guilt, and praises the rectitude he has tried to corrupt.

Much of the story was wildly improbable and the characterization by the standards of the great novelists was crude and obviously affected by the limitations of social allegory. A

candid friend of Godwin, Marshall, declared : "The incidents are ill-chosen; the characters unnatural, distorted; the phraseology intended to mark the humorous ones inappropriate; the style uncouth; everything upon stilts; the whole uninteresting; written as a man would make a chair or a table that had never handled a tool." The same friend had earlier advised Godwin : "If you have the smallest regard for your own reputation or interest you will immediately put the enclosed papers in the fire." But the majority agreed that "it was one of the most splendid and impressive works of imagination that has appeared in our times." A telling indictment of an authoritarian and class divided society, it was "the only great work of fiction in our language which owes its existence to the fruitful union of the revolutionary and romantic movements." "Godwin spoke to his own day as Hugo and Tolstoy to theirs, and his aim like theirs, was to free the human mind from slavery."

Today the chief value lies in the picture it gives of the age from which it sprang and the injustices that touched the consciences of the best minds of the time.

Caleb Williams enjoyed a considerable vogue abroad and was published in America, France aud Germany. George Colman even dramatized it and produced it on the stage under the title of *The Iron Chest*.

Five years later Godwin published another novel, *St. Leon* (1799), in which he blended his philosophical ideas with the theme of alchemy. *St. Leon* is the story of a man who has been given the alchemical secrets of the Philosopher's Stone and the *elixir vitae*. Boundless wealth and eternal youth are his, together with an almost equally boundless power of good and evil. St. Leon attempts to use his knowledge and wealth to benefit humanity, but soon learns that such gifts bring with them the destruction of personal relationships and domestic happiness and involve their possessor in endless hostility with the normal world. The allegorical teaching of St. Leon, that a man who attains wisdom and wishes to use it for the general good must expect and be willing to forgo the ordinary comforts of life and the benefits of domestic affection and even friendship in the course of his efforts, may be a reflection on Godwin's own experience. "Every man's hand will be against him and men will turn aside in misunderstanding and hostility from the benefits he seeks to bestow on them." The book contains a touching portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft in

the person of Marguerite, the wife of St. Leon.

Two other didactic novelists whose work deserves mention were Dr. Moore and Thomas Holcroft. Dr. Moore's *Zeluco* (1786) is a study of the cruelty and injustice power breeds in men. The chief character, Zeluco, who comes of a noble Sicilian family, is a thorough-paced scoundrel, actuated in all his doings by lust, cruelty, selfishness and revenge. As a child he crushes a sparrow to death ; later he drives his widowed mother to her grave broken-hearted and has a slave beaten to death in the West Indies. Even when he loves he behaves with unspeakable cruelty even to the extent of killing his own child and driving its mother insane. But repulsive and unlikely as many of the incidents were, the story was well told and was used to ventilate social grievances and advance the humanitarian cause.

Thomas Holcroft, the son of a shoemaker and horsedealer, was a friend of Godwin and Tom Paine. He knew poverty and disillusionment at first hand, and attacked the corrupt aristocratic society he thought was responsible. Holcroft's stories are partly autobiographical and have some interest for the sociologist even if they have little to offer to the student of literature. He supported revolutionary ideas and wrote several novels in the spirit of *Caleb Williams*. In the *Memoirs of Bryan Perdue* (1805) he opposed capital punishment and lent his support to the prison reformers.

Women were not slow to use fiction as a means of expressing their particular problems. The most interesting of these writers was undoubtedly Mary Hays, an emotional free-thinker who demanded freedom for women from the tyranny of social conventions in matters of the heart. Her heroines were apt to make gods of their passions and opposed even legitimate restraint. Mary Hays, like so many radical thinkers of her time, was convinced that the moral delinquency of the individual was a symptom of diseased social system.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the novel, still the most popular literary form, had become the playground for ghouls, social reformers, anarchists irked by England's hostility to free thought, and for theory-mongers of all kinds. It was saved for literature by the timely appearance of a new generation of great novelists, welcome after some three decades of mediocrity.

CHAPTER 6

Fiction During the Regency

THE NOVEL OF TERROR—by its repulsive themes and creaking artifices—brought novel-reading into disrepute. Intelligent people left it to the Lydia Languishes and Isabella Thorpes and their maids. The latest literary form seemed already by the begining of the nineteenth century at the point of death from overstrain.

The circulating libraries, too, had helped to discredit fiction, by flooding the market with hack stuff of no literary merit and often unscrupulously bad.

Nevertheless Mrs. Radcliffe's popularity with minds not unworthy to judge showed that there was a growing need for more freedom of imagination in fiction. Norman Collins in his *Facts of Fiction* suggested that by the first decade of the new century English readers were slowly recovering from a surfeit of psychology.

> For Gothic romance, with its superficial encumbrance of psychical ghostly gimcrackery, was in reality a highly developed psychological literature, in which unfortunately all the major characters were a trifle mawkish, and all minor characters a little mad But, psychological it was; and the success or failure of such a novel depended on whether or not the shivering along the spine was strong enough to reach the brain.

It was Walter Scott, the "prophesier of things past," who set the novel on its feet again. He brought to the contemporary interest in the romantic past his own splendid gifts of imagination and developed an almost new genre, the historical novel. In the pages of his books the past lived again in glowing but credible colours. When John Murray, the publisher, read *Waverley* and wrote to his wife: "It is excellent. No dark passages, no secret chambers, no wind howling in long galleries," he was voicing the relief many must have felt at the return of a healthy normality to fiction.

Some credit, however, must first be given to Scott's immediate predecessor Maria Edgeworth, the Irish writer, whose work samewhat resembled his, except in the larger attributes of genius. Both had an unshakable faith in conservatism, and the same stern conception of duty tempered with pity and

compassion. In a lesser way she did for the Irish what he was to do for the Scots.

Miss Edgeworth (1767-1849) belonged to an old English family settled in Ireland since the sixteenth century. She knew at first hand the problems she discussed, and allowed neither sentiment nor prejudice to blind her to the wrong suffered by the Irish people. The root of the prevailing distress in Ireland lay in the absentee landlord, whose indifference to the old bond between tenant and owner was ruining the honest peasantry by allowing callous agents to exploit their industry and thrift.

Miss Edgeworth's first novel of any length was *Castle Rackrent* (1799-1800), described as "an Hibernian Tale, Taken from facts and from the manners of the Irish Squires, before the year 1782." It has the distinction of being the first novel to trace the saga of a family through several generations. Thady Quirk, steward to the Rackrent family, tells the story of the family since he has known it and relates its decline through four generations from prosperity and honour to misery and decay. The first Rackrent, the hard-drinking Sir Patrick, founds the family fortunes. Next comes the litigious Sir Murtagh, who by his unsuccessful litigation puts a heavy burden on its estates. He is followed by Sir Kit, a gambler and an absentee, who marries a Jewess for her money, but is ruined when she refuses to let him sell her jewels. Last comes Sir Condy, who tosses up whether he shall marry the rich Miss Moneygawl or the pretty Judy Quirk, runs through the ramainder of the Rackrent property and involves the House of Rackrent in its final degradation. The book gives a vivid picture of the reckless living which in the eighteenth century brought many Irish landlords to ruin.

Other novels about Ireland followed, notably *Belinda* (1801), *Lenora* (1806) and, in 1809, the first series of *Tales of Fashionable Life*. The vexed question of absenteeism is discussed again and again, but Miss Edgeworth reserved her bitterest strictures for *The Absentee* (1812). To satisfy his empty-headed wife's passion for society Lord Clonbrony, the absentee landlord of Irish estates, lives in London and entertains lavishly. As a result of his wife's extravagance he gets in debt and falls into the hands of Jewish moneylenders. His son, Lords Colambre, sensible young man, visits his father's estates incognito and sees for himself the evils of absenteeism.

A marriage of this son to an Irish heiress enables the debts to be discharged and the story closes with the promise of a happier era when Lord and Lady Clonbrony return to their estates.

Later novels were *Patronage* (1814), *Harrington* (1817) and *Ormond* (1817), which not only contains some of her best character- drawing but presents an entertaining picture of fashionable Paris society in the eighteenth century.

Maria Edgeworth's novels were important historically, in heading the novel off again towards realism, but they suffer from too conscious moralizing. Her interest in the unfortunate anticipates the great sociological novelists of the next decade, such as Dickens, Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell.

The quite competence of the Irish writer, however, faded before the splendour of her Scottish contemporary, who suddenly decided to do for Scotland what she had done for Ireland, and to do it better. When Walter Scott took to writing novels, still at the height of his fame as a narrative poet (he had refused the Laureateship before *Waverley* appeared), he brought to his task not only a passionate enthusiasm, but a mind packed with material—the ancient song and story of his beloved "Caledonia stern and wild."

Born in Edinburgh in 1771, Scott came of a long line of Border lairds and yeomen, many of whom had played a notable part in Scottish history. "There are few in Scotland under the titled nobility, who can trace their blood to so many stocks of distinction." Thwarted by ill health from any hope of himself becoming a soldier, he spent his boyhood seeking adventure at second-hand among books, and learning by heart a prodigious number of stirring Border ballads. The memory of battles long ago became part of his mental make-up and took their place beside more recent events likely to fire a boy's imagination, for, less than thirty years before his birth, the Jacobite war had drawn a sharp sword between Highland and Lowland Scot, dividing loyalties and putting chivalry to the test. In Scott's youth figures from that old world still haunted the Edinburgh streets. From his earliest years he read every kind of literature he could lay his hands on—often, he tells us, beginning a book in the middle or wherever he found something to interest him. He had a facile but inaccurate knowledge of Latin; Greek he never acquired at all; but he picked up enough Italian, German, Spanish and

French to read the books that interested him. For history and every form of antiquarin lore he had a deep passion, and it was natural that in his fifteenth year he should enter upon the profession of the law, like his father before him.

Law was, along with the masterpieces of English literature and the ballads and traditions of the Borders, the chief educative force in Walter Scott's life. He never became a great lawyer, but the humours and pedantries of the legal profession had an abiding effect upon his work. As a lawyer's apprentice he visited the Highlands, and made the acquaintance of Mr. Stewart of Invernahyle, who had fought a duel with Rob Roy and who was "out" with Prince Charlie. In his office work Scott acquired the gift of steady and laborious writing, and it is recorded that he once covered without a halt one hundred and twenty pages of folio, thereby earning thirty shillings for pocket money.

Lockhart, his future son-in-law and his biographer, tells a good story of how a party of law students were disturbed in their carousing by a hand clearly visible in an opposite window.

> Since we sat down I have been watching it, it fascinated my eye, it never stops, page after page is finished and thrown on that heap of MS. and still it goes on unwearied —and so it will be till candles are brought in and God knows how long after that.

The hand was writing *Waverley*.

The secret of the invaluable and indefatigable industry was discipline. Scott imposed on himself an inexorable routine which suited his character, being contemptuous of the slippered Bohemianism that justified its shortcomings by pleading the artistic temperament. Lockhart writes that :

> He rose by five o'clock, lit his own fire when the season required one, and shaved and dressed with great deliberation, for he was a very martinet as to all the mere coxcombries of the toilet, not abhorring effeminate dandyism itself so cordially as the slightest approach to personal slovenliness, or even those "bed-gown and slipper tricks" as he called them, in which literary men are so apt to indulge. Arrayed in his shooting-jacket or whatever dress he meant to use till dinner-time, he was seated at his desk by six

> o'clock, all his papers arranged before him in the most accurate order, and his books of reference marshalled around him on the floor, while at least one favourite dog lay watching, his eye just beyond the line of circumvallation. Thus by the time the family assembled for breakfast between nine and ten, he had done enough in his own language "to break the neck of the day's work."

By noon he was his own man again and could spend his leisure tramping over the Border country with his dogs, garnering an inexhaustible store of legends and anecdotes, observing in the raw characters that nature had moulded, studying lives that were close to the blood-stained past, still torn by feuds and fierce conflicts, that were part of the essence of tragi-comedy, as richly native as the peat-coloured streams and the granite hills.

Out of his experiences Scott created the historical novel. Few novelists before him had attempted to write historical fiction. Admittedly Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve and Mrs. Radcliffe had been concerned in their Gothic romances with periods sufficiently remote to be invested with romantic charm and to offer scope for the imaginative treatment of history. But none of these writers possessed any feeling for historical realism and they made no attempt to induce in the reader a willing suspension of disbelief.

Scott's romances, on the other hand, were based on special research. By study, and aided by such imaginative understanding of men and events as the poet and dramatist used to pierce the outer tegument of life, Scott opened up new regions of the past. He was no innovator in history, but content to take the accepted historians of his day and he introduced nothing inconsistent with the main tendencies of the period. He permitted himself only the same licence as Shakespeare in changing the sequence of events occasionally for dramatic effect, but characters and motives remained inviolate. In order, however, to give himself greater imaginative freedom in building up the story Scott preferred either to invent his chief characters and allow the genuine historical personages to play a subsidiary part, as in *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, or to concentrate on a minor historical figure whose existence was sufficiently shadowy to allow of conjecture as in *Kenilworth*. He avoided pedantic realism on the one hand

and a purely romantic approach to history on the other.

Scott's choice of language for the historical novels was likewise a compromise between pedantry and contemporary idiom. Before he published any novel himself Scott had actually completed and edited *Queenhoo Hall*, and the experience was not lost on him. This historical romance written by Joseph Strutt, an antiquarian, was set in the period of Henry VI, and the author, in order to achieve greater realism, employed a language that was authentically archaic. Scott realized that pedantic fidelity to period and precisely archaic language, however titilating to the student, resulted in unreadable fiction, and his own creative sense led him to make a more eclectic use of his material. Rejecting antiquarian realism and over-accuracy, he favoured a language approximating to common speech, but heightened with poetry and with just enough of archaism to create an illusion of the past. The average reader of novels at that time would demand no more.

Scott's strongest stimulus to literary fame was the desire to recreate for himself a feudal past, and when the exotic genius of Byron threatened to diminish his own glory and profit as a poet he sought new fields. In 1813 he discovered by chance in a bureau a manuscript, one of many started long before and thrown aside unfinished. He looked at it, saw its possibilities, and in three weeks had completed *Waverley*, which came out anonymously in 1814.

It was not a very far step for the poet to turn to novel-writing, and by blending fact and fiction give it the new lease on life it so badly needed. Even the false Romanticism was grist to his mill. He could burlesque "this Gothic generation" and, when necessary, make use of the Romantic paraphernalia himself. *Waverley* took the world by storm. Before long it was followed by *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary*, *The Black Dwarf* (a Gothic romance that was to fascinate the young Brontës) and *Old Mortality*, all published in 1816. The last named is based on anecdotes told by a supporter of the Covenanters and covers the period from the military operations taken against them in 1678, under the command of John Grahame of Claverhouse, to the more peaceful days of religious toleration introduced by William III. The story included an interesting study of the character of Claverhouse and a vivid picture of the follies to which religious enthusiasm had carried the Covenanters.

In *Waverley* Scott's heart was in the Highlands. He contrasted the poetry and chivalry of the Stuart-loving Highlands with the matter-of-fact concrete good sense in political affairs that characterized the Lowlands. His novels show the strong tide of imagination released by the Romantic movement sweeping back into the past, flushing the stones of history with colour and brightness. The past lived again in his pages; not the dust-dreary reconstruction of pedants, but warm, breathing, excitingly alive. The reading public at last found the author for which it was waiting—one who could recreate the past because he had lived it, in his friends, in his ancestors, in his memories. Beside him the Terror novelists with their gimcrack castles, their theatrical villains, stilted language and air of unreality appeared synthetic and unsatisfying.

When Scott began to write novels he was no longer young, which probably explains why he was able to subordinate the love interest so easily to the needs of history. He had vast reading and experience of men to draw upon and had a mature philosophy to guide him. His universality, too, bordered on genius, enabling him to blend tragic and comic elements and to bring out their full force against a prosaic background of the normal.

The success of the *Waverley* novels was enormous. When, after much excited speculation, the identity of their author was established he was welcomed by the Prince Regent, and honoured by leading statesmen in Germany and France. Byron sealed an earlier friendship by the gift of a sepulchral urn filled with ancient Greek bones.

The material rewards were fantastic. For many years Scott had been a secret partner in the printing firm of John Ballantyne, though he took no interest in the business side, merely providing copy for printing. Now his literary efforts brought him a shower of gold. He used it to raise out of the Scottish mists the Gothic palace of Abbotsford. Here, surrounded by his dogs, his domestics and his family he lived the life of a feudal baron, or rather his own romanticized version of how a feudal baron should live. His expenditure was colossal; but so, for a time, was his good fortune. Amid the grey hills and the heather of the wild Border country Scott enjoyed the happiest period of his life.

Scott was never the sublime, inevitable artist. He had no special love for the form of the novel, and if *Waverley* had

failed he would never have written another. But his needs were pressing, he had discovered a vein of fiction that seemed inexhaustible and highly profitable and the time was just ripe for him. A happy concatenation of circumstances led a man with a mature mind, a rich experience of life and a passionate love of the past to write novels.

From his youth Scott had been a skilled story-teller, and from his reading he drew his historical scenes ; but what made his novels unique was the combination of realism and historical insight—the power to recreate his background and people it with a vast concourse of men and women—some of them real historical personages and some the children of his fecund imagination What a portrait gallery he had to offer—peasants, clansmen, heroes, kings, the wild people of the hills, slum-dwellers, traitors and saints, all described with the authenticity that springs from direct knowledge. Even ill-health (he was consumptive) was powerless to check the astounding fertility of his brain. In 1817, in spite of intense and ceaseless pain, he wrote *Rob Roy*, a stirring tale of the period just preceding the first Jacobite rising. Scott's heroines as a rule are lovely, virtuous but doll-like and unindividualized, but in this work the high-spirited and tender Di Vernon is an exception.

Next year came *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1818), dictated while Scott was in such agony that afterwards he remembered nothing of the story. It is his greatest experiment in sustained tragedy, and the atmosphere with which the book is charged gives it much of its sombre power. The shrill voice of prophecy pronounces the doom of a great house. The Master of Ravenswood, desolate and forlorn in his eyrie, Wolf's Craig, high on the precipitous hillside above the waves that thunder on the fanged rocks, is a typical romantic hero. The dispossessed heir of a ruined family, he takes refuge in his scowling pride from the bitter reproaches of poverty. He falls in love with Lucy Ashton, daughter of the family that destroyed his own, but she is driven into a hated marriage by her mother, her letter of appeal to Ravenswood is intercepted and she is made to believe that her lover has abandoned her. Immediately after the ceremony Ravenswood, at last apprised of what is going forward, appears and challenges Lucy's brother and her husband to duels on the morrow. The same night Lucy stabs her husband and is found insane, and shortly after dies. Ravenswood, regardless of the old prophecy and of

his servant's entreaties, gallops furiously along the shore to meet his antagonists to fight a duel and is swallowed up in a quicksand. Scott's description of his death has the solemn inevitability of Greek drama and is a masterpiece of restrained horror.

In his next novel, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818). Scott made amends to the Covenanters, who had resented his strictures on their creed in *Old Mortality*. Jeanie Deans, the simple Scottish girl, with her strength and integrity, her courage and good sense, is among his finest characters. Her refusal of the Laird of Dumbedikes, and her appeal to Queen Caroline for her sister's life, have a fidelity to nature which is unmistakable.

Scott's favourite period was the stretch of Scottish history from the Covenanters to the Jacobites where he scarcely ranks as an historical novelist, since the events of which he writes were still a living memory to many. But in his next book, *Ivanhoe* (1819), he went back for his plot to the early Middle Ages—bringing into his story the good Richard Coeur de Lion, the black-hearted John and the glamorous figure of Robin Hood. The love interest is slight, and *Ivanhoe's* Lady Rowena is as insipid as most of Scott's historical heroines, but the purely masculine part of the story is told with a schoolboyish gusto. The air is loud with the clash of steel on steel and bright with fluttering pennants. Knights ride against one another full armour, and in the spectator's gallery the ladies are decorative enough to bring gaiety as well as gallantry into the embattled lists. The great ones of the past speak in Shakespearean cadences and there is a sincere attempt to create a "period" atmosphere.

Scott's interest in Middle Ages was stimulated by the acquisition of Abbotsford, a house built, he believed, on the pilgrim route to the great Melrose Abbey whose majestic ruins had always thrilled his heart. He began to study monastic life in England and soon realized that the key to the right understanding of the Middle Ages lay in the hands of the Roman Church. In the library at Abbotsford were to be found a history of the Benedictine Order, published in 1626, and Fosbroke's *British Monachism*, the latter an invaluable source of information for such works as *The Abbot* and *The Monastery*.

In Scott's youth all trace of Catholic worship had

publicly disappeared and the ruins of the once-powerful monasteries and abbeys were appreciated solely as so much romantic decor. Protestants still derided the rites and beliefs of the once universal faith as degraded superstitions. No novelist before Scott had written about Catholics seriously, while to the Terror school of fiction-writers cowls and cloisters had been simply so much stage property to heighten the melodrama. It was to Scott that the revaluation of Catholicism in England was largely due, as Newman recognised in 1839 when he wrote :

> By means of his popularity he reacted on his readers, stimulating their mental thirst, feeding their hopes, setting before them visions, which once seen are not easily forgotten and silently indoctrinating them with noble ideas which might afterwards be appealed to as first principles.

George Borrow, that sturdy opponent of the Papists, blamed Scott for the Oxford Movement. What Scott discovered through his study of monasticism was not the obscuranticism, tyranny, superstition and darkness that had been the unenlightened view for centuries, but a worthier conception of man and his place in the universe than anything contemporary world had to offer. He found or thought he found a spiritual and social brotherhood and a social system inspired not by commerce and industry but by spiritual ties and a belief in the immortality of the soul. In this way Scott led serious thinkers, like Ruskin and William Morris, back to the past to seek not a picturesque romanticism but a finer way of life more expressive of the spirit of man.

In defining the bonds of the feudal system, in which he saw a symbol of the true brotherhood of Christ, Scott started a reaction in favour of the Middle Ages that Carlyle was to strengthen and which was to inspire Disraeli to a new conception of Conservatism.

The flow of novels continued through 1820 with *The Monastery*, a story set in the reign of Elizabeth when the reformed doctrines were first making their way in Scotland and raising up troubles for the religious communities. In this novel the author makes use of supernatural machinery in the form of the White Lady of Avenel, a wonder-performing spirit or sylph. *The Abbot*, a sequel to *The Monastery*, and

published in the same year, is concerned with that period of the life of Mary Queen of Scots which she spent in imprisonment at Lochleven Castle, her escape, the rally of her supporters, and their defeat at the battle of Langside and her withdrawal across the Border. In *Kenilworth* (1821) the story strikes near to the heart of English greatness and inspired Scott to paint an excellent picture of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester. The novel is based on the tradition of the tragic fate of the beautiful Amy Robsart, who, in the reign of Elizabeth, was enticed into a marriage with Leicester and was found dead under somewhat mysterious circumstances. In the study of Leicester's evil genius, the alchemist Ascola—quacksalver, poisoner and astrologer—Scott revealed his interest in the occult.

The Fortunes of Nigel (1822) is set in the London of James the First. It gives a good picture of the Court with the old King alternately chivvying and slobbering over his handsome young favourite, while contrasted with the Court setting is the underworld of White Chapel, where the riffraff of society took sanctuary from justice.

Scott's phenomenal energy still showed no signs of flagging. Hot in the heels of one book came another. In 1823 appeared *Peveril of the Peak*, a tale of the Popish Plot containing elaborare portraits of Charles II and Buckingham, which gives glimpses of such historical characters as Titus Oates and Colonel Blood, who tried to steel the Crown Jewels from the Tower. *Quentin Durward* (1823) contains Scott's best piece of psychology in the fine portrait of Louis XI of France, at whose Court the scene of the novel is set. It was followed by *St. Ronan's Well*, a scene of contemporary life in the Scottish spas, whose idle, fashionable society is satirically described and which provides a background to the story of the feud between two brothers hinging on a secret marriage.

Scott was at the height of his powers. His invention never halted, and within the large framework of the ready-made plot which he had inherited from Fielding his characters moved with easy conviction. In this high-summer of his success came *Redgauntlet* (1824), written on a theme dear to his heart—the Stuart tragedy of pride and shipwrecked hopes. Written from the actual memory of those involved, the story centres on an apocryphal return of Prince Charles

Edward after 1745 to try his fortunes once more—an attempt that meets with inglorious failure. The leader of the movement is Mr. Redgauntlet, a fanatical Jacobite. Much of the story was drawn from anecdotes and memories, but for one superb digression Scott was indebted to his own imagination. This is *Wandering Willie's Tale*, an example of the perfect short story in which the domestic drama of a lost receipt for rent is blended with keen satire and pawky Scots humour. The note of suspense is well maintained and the Prince of Darkness appears as a courteous stranger seeing justice done although hell has to be invaded.

Suddenly out of a clear sky the stormclouds massed and the bright vistas faded. The fairy gold vanished and with it the lifelong dreams of the Master of Abbotsford. There was no warning. Apparently secure in his self-made background of picturesque and feudal pomp, Scott was busy refurbishing from early manuscripts *The Betrothed* (1825) and *The Talisman*—a tale of the Crusades in the vein of *Ivanhoe*, when the crash came. He learned that all was not well with the publishing firm of Ballantyne, with which his fortunes were bound up. In January the House of Ballantyne, hit by the economic blizzard which was sweeping the country as an aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, was forced to suspend payment. The affairs of the firm had been in disorder for a considerable time, but Scott, happy in his dreams of the past and able to draw on seemingly inexhaustible funds, had not concerned himself with financial stability. When he learned of what had happened he immediately accepted full responsibility. Legally Scott had no financial obligations towards the firm's creditors, but he was a man of his honour who regarded bankruptcy as dishonourable and he insisted on shouldering the vast debt alone.

At the age of fifty-five, weary and broken in health, he saddled himself with enormous burden of debt, and refused to take the easy refuge of bankruptcy. For the rest of his days he toiled unceasingly at this task; he succeeded, but he died of it. It was, for him, a simple and faithful following out of his creed, not quixotic or fantastic but plain fidelity to the highest standards of human honour. He could not see that the rules of morality which held in the case of ordinary men should be slackened for the artist. He had no sympathy, as he said, "with the virtues which escaped in

salt rheum and sal volatile, and a white pocket-handkerchief." The dreamer who had dabbled so long among tales of ancient chivalry was to write into his own life-story, a chapter of tragic heroism.

He shut up Abbotsford, put his affairs in the hands of trustees, and set himself the fantastic task of grinding out novels until the last creditors should be paid. In *Woodstock* (1826), which reflects the mood of this period, Scott comments on his life:

> Years rush by us like the wind. We see not whence the eddy comes, nor whither it is tending, and we seem ourselves to witness their fight without a sense that we are changed; and yet time is beguiling man of his strength, as the winds rob the woods of their foliage.

Woodstock was written when misfortunes were heaping themselves upon the author: his financial ruin, the death of his wife and the grievous illness of his beloved grandson. *The Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827–8) and *Tales of My Landlord* (1832) followed, but Scott died in 1832—back in Abbotsford and at peace with himself.

The debt of the English novel at the time to Sir Walter Scott was considerable. His was the alchemy that transmuted the "horrid" elements into the pure gold of the creative imagination. What Richardson, Fielding and Smollett had done in holding a mirror up to the eighteenth-century way of life Scott did for the remote centuries of which his contemporaries knew little. He took names and dates from the history primer and transformed them into literature. He made dry bones live. Like an enchanter he walked through the tombs of time and quickened into life their ghostly inhabitants. There had been scattered attempts before Scott at the historical novel; but from now on it became the goal of almost every serious novelist to discover and work some new vein in the dark backward and abysm of time.

There may since have been more accurate interpretations of history, but Scott was an artist, not a scholar. He violated chronology; he invented situations; he allowed his imagination free play with the costume cupboard and the make-up box; but in making the past come alive he was gloriously successful. He saw history as a pageant sweeping by with tableaux, characters and moments of high drama. But behind the

changing scenes was a movement, a pattern, which he discerned and tried to interpret. His view of history was Elizabethan rather than modern—he saw the great struggles as expressions of moral destiny, not as a record of events. The actors in the drama knew their parts and were impelled to play them. Scott depicted their behaviour but he did not inquire too closely into causes and motives or attempt for the most part to explore the psychology of his characters. It is on this point that he differs so much from the present-day writer of historical fiction. If he glamourized the past, it was partly because he saw in the past centuries the values which modern life was rapidly destroying. He loved the spirit of the Middle Ages which he thought bound men in the brotherhood of Christ; he saw these bonds being cast away in exchange for a soulless "cash nexus," while in the economic freedom of *laissez faire* he saw not individualism but indifference and selfishness. Above all, it was the poetry of distance that exercised its magic upon him, drawing him, fascinated, towards a visionary magnificence, a richness and a glory. When he approached the less remote past the attraction was warmer and more saddening. He drew near to catch the last flicker of the flames before the grey ashes cooled for ever.

He was a conservative because he loved tradition, but he was alive to the part humble people had played in history and he never under-stimated their importance. His faith was rooted in the Established Church and State, and his loyalty to both was emotional. If, in the depths of his heart, he yearned after the lost Stuart cause, it was, after all, a cause too long lost to be a political issue. It was an echo, lingering on the air—air that was already being fouled by the smoke of industrial chimneys—but an imp of romantic chivalry in Scott cherished its memory and brought it back to life in the pages of fiction.

Scott's fame endured for a hundred years and then suffered a sudden decline in the twentieth century. Rhetoric went out of fashion; and the special rhetoric of history that he had created became a target for fact-finders. Lovers of monochorome found his rich colours unsubtle. His limitations were thought to outweigh his achievements. A new generation of readers found his ladies too celestial, his prologues too long, his heroes too massive and his descriptions of scenery wearisome.

Intent on guying the "tushery" of his clock-and-dagger characters, the stuffed mail-shirts, the furred and bonneted nobles, critics studiously ignored the masterly delineation of the Lowland Scotts he knew and loved.

In spite of his achievements it cannot be seriously denied that Scott is neglected today by the connoisseurs of historical fiction. This is partly due to the fact that he inaugurated the genre and was then followed by writers who, having his experience to guide them, excelled him, and partly by his refusal to take himself seriously as a writer. Scott prided himself on being a gentleman first and a writer second, an attitude to life incompatible with the scrnpulous artistry needed to turn a work of fiction into a work of art, not for him the seven years' toil that Tolstoy devoted to *War and Peace*. Scott wrote hastily, revised inadequately and refused to concern himself with form at all, content that a novel "should commence strikingly, proceed naturally and happily, widening and deepening in interest as it flows on."

It is hard to conjecture whether or not Fortune's wheel will revolve again in Scott's favour, but unlikelier things have happened in the history of taste.

The age that produced Sir Walter Scott produced another novelist in almost every way his antithesis, whose contribution to the shaping or the novel was far greater, and whose reputation has suffered no such eclipse. Beside Scott's bold and crowded frescoes hang the exquisite miniatures of Jane Austen, in which superbly malicious, delicious and lovable portraits of the provincially genteel are traced on the finest ivory. Presiding over the polite tea-table, Jane Austen recorded apparently nothing more momentous than the "divine chit-chat" that enlivened a gossiping age. And yet by some trick she did it with a genius that rested not only on an infinite capacity for taking pains, but on a shrewd assessment of her own limitations. She knew what she wanted to do and within the limits she set herself she achieved perfection. There were no errors of judgment, no loose ends, no obvious purple patches and no sign of carelessness in construction. She is impossible to parody.

By common consent it is Jane Austen, the cultural isolationist who never strayed outside the family circle and who wrote her novels by stealth, who is hailed as the first modern novelist. In more recent times praise of her work has tended

to be excessive. Henry James and Max Beerbohm inspired by their admiration a "cult" of Jane. It is perhaps unnecessary to go so far as Mark Twain, who detested her and said that any library was a good one provided it didn't have her books in it, but a protest must be made against the tendency to extol her for more than the perfection she achieved as a miniaturist in fiction. It has been said :

> Misjudgments of Jane Austen usually arise from two simple errors. Those who decry her have generally searched for things utterly outside her scope and so been disappointed, and those who applaud her extravagantly are usually those who are content with something alarmingly less than the whole normal adult range of life. . . . For the boundaries of her mind, as distinct from its depth, are such that no more than a fragmant of human experience, the size of a hencoop, is enclosed.

Jane Austen (1775 – 1817) was born at Steventon in Hampshire, of which her father was rector, and she lived an uneventful life at her birthplace, at Bath, Southampton, Chawton and Winchester, where she died.

Even in private her way of life was singularly quiet and inconspicuous. When she lost the "dressing-room" at Steventon she never again had a room of her own in which she could write. Her nephew describes her writing in Chawton in a well-known passage :

> Most of her work must have been done in the common sitting-room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. She was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants, or visitors, or any person beyond her own family party. She wrote upon small sheets of paper which could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting paper. There was, between the front door and the offices, a swing door which creaked when it was opened; but she objected to having this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when anyone was coming.

Jane Austen not only lived a quiet, sheltered existence but she was also curiously immune from the great movements of her time. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars swept by her without comment. A soldier may swagger into one of her plots—but only to show how easily a uniform will turn the head of a pretty girl. If a naval officer is mentioned, it is only for a passing allusion to his low pay or to the trials

of a sailor's wife. She avoided the savage blight of the Industrial Revolution by living in Regency Bath or Royal Winchester. If one of her characters travels it is only to exchange the pleasant milieu of one country house for another, or for the more daring pleasure of regarding the sea from the charming little bay window of Lyme Regis.

Over the great literary movement which made or broke her contemporaries—the Romantic Agony—Jane Austen curled a faintly ironic lip. It is only her silliest young women—like Marianne Dashwood—who are "early driven wild" by the poetry of the day; or—like Catherine Morland—temporarily unbalanced by stuffing their heads with Terror stories.

In her world, the extremes of wealth and poverty were alike unknown. Three or four families, belonging to the country gentry of the professional middle class, would form their own social circle, rigorously controlled by the laws of good taste and the customs of what today would be called their income group. There were few incidents to ruffle the surface of existence at Steventon, and the observer who happened to be a creative artist as well was forced to concentrate on the nuances of character and the delicate interplay of nicely regulated emotions.

The highlights of such a life were little visits, morning calls, weddings, shopping expeditions, or the quizzing of new arrivals. The acme of excitement was a ball, and the most appalling social gaffe an elopement. All these go to make up the plots of Jane Austen's novels; but in books so tautly constructed they are never mere padding. Every morning call forwards the action. An important piece of information is conveyed in the dialogue, or a new character introduced. Little time is wasted on description, and what there is purely conventional. Her prose style—"a mouthful of thick words" was the way Alice Meynell described it—is devoid of musical cadences. But there is about Jane Austen and her novels a nostalgic suggestion of the elegancies of a leisured age—Adam ceilings, white-panelled rooms gleaming with crystal lustres, fragrant with mignonette and potpourri, where young ladies peep through chintz curtains at the glistening carriages of their more important acquaintances.

If Jane Austen's actual world was circumscribed, her artistic integrity led her to limit her writing still more closely to the "comedy of sex." She occupies a place between

Fielding and Meredith and she is perhaps more acutely observant than either. Nothing is hidden from her, and a character can be damned in a few swift strokes : "He had a face of strong, natural, sterling insignificance." What divert her most are "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies." Even in her reticences she is revealing. Meanness she detests, along with thick-skinned vulgarity. Her heroines, for all their faults, are always ladies ; and the brassy Miss Crawfords are deliberately inserted to point the contrast. Those who cannot be gay and charming should at least be "sensible, amiable and well-informed." Would-be blue-stockings are her aversion. The minds of the beings she invents and animates are as transparent to their creator as those who live about her. The secret complexities of self-love, the many vanities, the quiverings of selfishness, the odious unawareness of the arrogant and the vulgar, are all reflected in the glassy essence of refined irony.

There is some considerable discrepancy between the times at which her novels were published and their composition. *Pride and Prejudice* in its original form, and entitled *First Impressions*, was begun in 1796, refused by a publisher in 1797 and revised before ultimate publication in 1813. *Sense and Sensibility* was begun as early as 1797, but apparently left unfinished for many years. *Northanger Abbey*, her skit on the Terror romances, was begun in 1797, sold to a publisher in 1803, but not then published. The manuscript was recovered in 1816 and may have been revised, but appears to represent the earliest of her work. *Mansfield Park* was begun in 1811, *Emma* in 1815 and *Persuasion* in 1815. She was the author of two works which she did not publish—*Lady Susan*, a story written about 1805 of a designing coquette, and a fragment, *The Watsons*, which were both published in 1871.[1]

The discovery of the time scheme of her fiction disposes of the older notion that Jane Austen was precociously mature as an artist, composing three novels before she was twenty-two and three more between the ages of thirty-five and forty. It would be nearer to the truth to regard her as spending something like twenty-seven years on her six novels, writing them

1. See Q. D. Leavis : A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's *Art* *Scrutiny*, Vol. X, No. 1. "Lady Susan" into Mansfield Park, *Scrutiny*, Vol. X, No. 2.

with care, constantly revising and then allowing a full twelve months for each final rewriting before publication. When this is compared with Scott's haste, who at times produced four novels in one year, it is not surprising that the final versions of her novels had a formal perfection—no loose ends, no padding, no characterization for its own sake, and a flawlessly consistent idiom suited to the person who used it. Nothing is allowed in a Jane Austen novel that is not there for a clearly defined reason, to contribute to the plot, the drama of feelings, the moral structure or the necessary psychology. Each novel had its beginnings in some intimate fragment intended for her family's eye, some satiric experiment rich in subtle innuendo or some sketch enclosed in a letter designed to entertain a relative. It was in the supreme task of combining these elements into the finished work of fiction that she developed her art.

Sense and Sensibility (1811) gave Jane Austen her first success. The satire is implicit in the title and the novel contains certain type characters and situations that she was to present. It was followed in 1813 by her masterpiece, *Pride and Prejudice*, perhaps the first work of art in the history of English fiction.

The book has an incomparable freshness and sharpness of outline and the story is developed very largely through dialogue which gives it a trim spareness. She sets forth her comedy of manners in a spirit of amusement devoid of bitterness. Elizabeth Bennet, the high-spirited and warmhearted heroine, drew from her creator the comment, "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print."

There is a touch of caricature, which disappears from the later books, about Elizabeth's first suitor, the egregious Mr. Collins, and his insufferable patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. There is even a touch of it in the drawing of Mr. Bennet, who is reminiscent of Mr. Shandy, with his subtly restrained wit and his caustic but unperceived comments on the effusiveness and poor judgment of his wife and younger daughters. These characters, however, could occur in no other book, and are an integral part of this one.

The Lady Catherine de Bourgh who so riles Elizabeth would be accepted at her own valuation by simple little Fanny Price in Mansfield Park and she would be a figure of fun to a

heroine with the assured social background of Emma. Fanny Price, on the other hand, would never have dared to stand up and captivate Elizabeth's proud Mr. Darcy ; and the mean-spirited Mrs. Norris, who so persecutes poor Fanny, would have been soon put in her place by Emma or Elizabeth. Even the bores fit into place. Each bore speaks in the peculiar type of chatter which will most exasperate his or her allotted victim. Their gossip is never generalized, for it is Jane Austen's rule that two clearly defined minds must go to every dialogue. One speaker does not simply exist to feed the other.

Mansfield Park (1814) has a new gravity. Its author was touched by the wave of Evangelism that had already engulfed and swept away some quite respectable lady novelists. Jane Austen's humour saved her, and the book includes some masterly character-drawing. There is Lady Bertram, for instance, who hardly speaks, but is "one of those people who thinks nothing can be dangerous or difficult or fatiguing to anyone but themselves." Sir Thomas Bertram, who is drawn in greater detail, provides the memorable scene in which the grave head of the family returns unexpectedly to find his house ravaged by amateur theatricals.

Emma (1816), a favourite with many readers, shows an important development by combining the gaiety of the earlier books with the gravity of the later ones. Its heroine, Emma Woodhouse, lacks Elizabeth's intelligence, but for that reason is nearer to average womanhood. Being cast by nature as an heiress and leader of society in Highbury, she aspires to a role in which Providence itself frequently fails, namely a match-maker, and is exquisitely discomfited. Emma takes under her wing a pretty but foolish girl of seventeen, the natural daughter of some person unknown, and sets to work on schemes for her advancement. The story is mainly occupied with the mortification to which Emma is subjected as a result of her injudicious attempts to find a husband for Harriet. Emma plays the market in hearts for her friends, but is not averse to cornering a much-desired commodity for herself.

In *Emma* Jane Austen's favorite weapon, irony, is used superbly to deflate pretensions, mock vanity and lay bare the egoism that lurks, unsuspected, in family love.

Jane Austen died in 1817 and her last two novels were published posthumously.

Northanger Abbey (1818) is a literary burlesque. In it she

deigns to notice the Terror school and guys it deliciously. The ancient documents discovered in a drawer by Catherine Morland turn out to be an old laundry list. In the same way the false emotions of Romanticism are shown up for what they are—the products of an unfeeling mind which are banished when real feeling enters in. There is an exquisite example of false feeling in a letter of Isabella Thorpe's : He is the only man I ever did or ever could love, and I trust you will convince him of it. The Spring fashions are partly down, and the hats the most frightful you can imagine...."

In *Persuasion* (1811) satire and ridcule take a milder form; the tone is warmer and the interest is evoked by a more subtle interplay of the characters. Jane Austen gives to Anne Elliot the most moving love story she ever wrote, so tender in expression that it is a matter of tradition to before it echoed some chapter from the story of her own life. Anne is forced by the social prejudice of her family to break off her engagement to Frederick Wentworth, a young naval officer with whom she is deeply in love. The story is concerned with the gradual revival of his passion for her when the bloom of youth has faded—and they are eventually married.

As a novelist Jane Austen employed the dramatic form evolved by Fielding but she refined it and gave it perfection. There are no digressions, no intrusions by the author instead, we are offered a completely lifelike impression in which the movement of time is subtly controlled. She waits until her characters are ripe for an experience before she introduces them. She catches the dynamic moment which precipitates the crisis and then within the scope of her psychology allows the dènouement to proceed according to plan.

It is idle to condemn her, as Charlotte Bronte did, for lacking qualities she never pretended to possess. With "the heart of a humming bird and a head as hard as a hailstone" she could never have portrayed passion. By identifying love with marriage and ignoring passion she avoided the tragedies that blast convention and make a hell of heaven. A Heathcliff in her world could have been exhibited only at a fair. It was a part of her philosophy that a happy marriage was the best thing for everybody. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." One of her characters, a very young girl, remarks, "I would rather be a school-teacher, (and I can think

of nothing worse) than marry a man I did not love." But her sister, who had known the worst, replies: "I should not like to marry a disagreeable man any more than yourself, but I do not think there are very many disagreeable men. I think I could like any good-humoured man with a comfortable income." But Jane Austen does not like her female characters to be so outspoken; it shows "too bold and masculine a temper' to evince too great avidity in husband-hunting. Her novels are consequently preoccupied with the business of making matches for her heroines, and she laments that there are not so many men of fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them. The plots are formalized into a pattern of which the purpose is match-making. The heroine after a few false starts meets the right man, and a series of misunderstandings and frustrations proceeds to delay but never to prevent their union.

And yet, behind the comedy of sex there are glimpses of resentment at the limitations of an economic world in which women had no future but wat their husbands could provide —or their fathers, if they had been unlucky in the hunt. Intelligence was a fatal defect to a woman whose value was assessed in the marriage market.

> Intelligence in women is a handicap to their social success. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman, especially if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can. I will only add, in justice to me, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable, too well-informed themselves to desire anything more in women than ignorance.

So the eternal comedy of sex is played out in its least ambiguous form the young ladies make cages and the agreeable young men are only too ready to be caught in them. Death takes no toll of her characters and the worst of all sins is vulgarity.

Another satirist of the contemporary scene, less creative than Jane Austen but more richly endowed intellectually, was the lively readable Thomas Love Peacock, who to the comedy of sex added the Aristophanic farce of ideas. The novel

of ideas popularized by Godwin's generation at last acquired a sense of humour.

Peacock (1785—1866), the son of a London merchant, found a business career uncongenial, and for some time he lived on his means, producing some pedestrian verse and three brilliant satirical romances – *Headlong Hall* (1816), *Melincourt* (1817), with an orang outang (Sir Oran Hautton) as a hero, and *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), an entertaining skit on the Romantics. Shortage of funds at length forced Peacock to seek employment and he found a very comfortable niche for himself in the East India Company. His entrance papers were returned by the examiners with the comment "nothing superfluous and nothing wanting" – a phrase that might be used to express the distinction of his prose style. The Company proved an unconscious benefactor and made him the possessor, on evidence of the slightest qualifications, of an office that ultimately brought him an income of two thousand five hundred pounds a year, with many gratuities and a modicum of responsibility. He neatly described conditions in the Company's service in the following lines :

> From ten to eleven, ate a breakfast for seven :
> From elevn to noon, to begin 'twas too soon :
> From twelve to one, asked "What's to be done?"
> From one to two, found nothing to do :
> From two to three began to foresee
> That from three to four would be a damned bore.

The first literary outcome of his life at the India Office was *Maid Marian* (1822), which was followed by *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829). In 1831 he published *Crochet Castle*, considered by many to be his best novel, distinguished by its vigorous satire on Lord Brougham and his Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It is, however, less brilliantly witty than *Nightmare Abbey* and has less grace and mellowness than *Gryll Grange*, which followed it at a distance of nearly thirty years in 1860.

Peacock's novels are a curious mixture of satire – personal, social and political – and romance and are written in a singularly piquant and attractive style. The dialogue is witty and diverting, and the passage of time has succeeded only in sharpening the force of his satire against theory-mongers and innovators and the supporters of "advanced" ideas. Much

that in his day was merely potentially visible has since become a sad, sober reality.

Headlong Hall is formed like all Peacock's novels, except the romances, on the simple plan of assembling visitors at a country house where they carry on discussions, eat and drink abundantly, dance and sing, fall in love and are married off in the last chapter.

The book contains hardly any plot but much entertaining and instructive discussion between Mr Foster, the perfectibilian, who is convinced that the world is improving all the time, Mr. Escot, the deteriorationist, who is equally convinced that it is deteriorating, and Mr. Jenkinson, the statu-quo-ite, who believes that on balance everything remains much as it was before. Dr. Gaster, a gluttonous divine, preserves the peace and pays the finest compliments to the Epicurean fare provided by Squire Headlong, who has invited his guests to a house party. The assembly provides hilarious commentaries on the intellectual obsessions of the day. Burlesque incidents and some tenderly ludicrous romance enliven the story, which moves at a good pace and is punctuated by delightful lyrics.

Nightmare Abbey is a lustrous satire on Byronism, Coleridgean transcendentalism and pessimism in general. In it Peacock took a heavy toll of his friends. Shelley is there as Scythrop, torn between conflicting loves, and seeking release from the romantic dilemma his oversusceptible heart has created with the cry, immortalized by Werther, "A pint of port and pistol !" but showing an unpoetic readiness to learn that the clock, which is to signal the end of his mortal lot, is fast. Scythrop is used to mock the youthful enthusiasts who devoured German tragedies and romances and entertained hopes of conquering the world and common sense through secret conspiracies. After an unfortunate love affair Scythrop

> became troubled with the *Passion for reforming* the world. He built many castles in the air, and peopled them with secret tribunals and bands of illuminati, who were always the imaginary instruments of his projected regeneration of the human species. As he intended to institute a perfect republic, he invested himself with absolute sovereignty over these mystical dispensers of liberty. He slept with Horrid Mysteries under his pillow, and dreamed of venerable eleutherarchs and ghastly confederates holding midnight conventions in subterranean caves. He passed whole mornings in his study, immersed in gloomy reverie,

> stalking about the room in his nightcap, which he pulled over his eyes like a cowl, and folding his striped calico dressing-gown about him like the mantle of a conspirator.

The scene in which Scythrop, caught in his Tower with its sliding doors and secret panels, attempts to conceal from his father the presence of a mysterious lady and from her the import of his father's conversation, is a masterpiece of comedy.

Mr. Flosky, a transcendental philosopher, is a lively caricature of Coleridge who "never gave a plain answer to a question" in his life. Here is a typical piece of mystification in answer to a simple question posed by a young lady :

> To say that I do not know would be to say that I am ignorant of something; and God forbid, that a transcendental metaphysician, who had pure anticipated cognitions of everything, and carries the whole science of geometry in his head without ever having looked into Euclid, should fall into so empirical an error as to declare himself ignorant of anything : to say that I do know, would be to pretend to positive circumstantial knowledge touching present matter of fact, which, when you consider the nature of evidence, and the various lights in which the same thing may be seen...." Marionetta : "I See, Mr. Flosky, that either you have no information, are determined not to impart it; and I beg your pardon for having given you this unnecessary trouble." Mr. Flosky : "My dear Miss O'Carroll, it would have given me great pleasure to have said that would have given you pleasure; but if any person living could make report of having obtained any information on any subject from Ferdinando Flosky, my transcendental reputation would be ruined for ever."

Gryll Grange, written when Peacock was seventy-four, shows no falling off in wit and inventiveness. In this novel the house party that is the usual feature of his books is diversified by the addition of an eccentric young gentleman, Algernon Falconer, who lives in a beautiful tower attended by seven 'Vestals' as beautiful as they are virtuous. The slender thread of the plot concerned with the love affairs of a Falconer and Lord Curryfin, a pantopragmatic, ends in a prodigious marriage at which nine brides are wedded to nine bridegrooms. Dr. Opimian, the chief wit of *Gryll Grange*, is an agreeable gourmet who combines much learning with conservative views and who can discourse with charm on any subject from the Greek theatre and ancient music to cooking and card-playing

and enliven everything he touches with curious erudition and apt quotation. The science of Pantopragmatics is defined by Dr. Opimian :

> It seems to be a rea art of talking about an imaginary art of teaching every man his own business. Nothing practical comes of it, and indeed so much the better. It will be at least harmless, as long as it is like Hamlet's reading: "words, words, words." Like most other sciences, it resolves itself into lecturing, lecturing, lecturing, about all sorts of matters, relevant and irrelevant : one enormous bore prating about jurisprudence, another about statistics, another about education, and so forth; the *crambe rèpetita* of the same rubbish, which has already been served up "twice hot and twice cold" at as many other associations nicknamed scientific.

The satire here is directed against Lord John Russell and Lord Brougham and the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Peacock's method is to let his characters talk about themselves without being aware that they are shamelessly exposing their own absurdities. His favourite device is to select a group of characters in whose intellects certain ideas have crystallized and to endow them with eloquence, pertinacity and a passion for expounding their cherished theories. He invites them to a house party, adds a spice of romantic interest—this is always done with great charm—and awaits the royal tournament of words that must ensue. Peacock detested fads and theories; as he grew older he learned to stand still gracefully and he feared for the happiness and sanity of mankind if those people with a passion for reforming things once gained the upper hand. A refined epicureanism and urbane kindliness mellowed with age a spirit aristocratic in its prejudices. Being a master hand at reproducing conversations, elucidating ideas, posing problems and accurately hitting off fads and fashions, Peacock animated the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century with irresistible humour.

His chief targets were Brougham and his Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Malthus, Bentham and the Utilitarians *en bloc* and all the exponents of the dismal science of political economy. Like Pope in the Dunciad, Peacock was the enemy of Dullness and could effectively expose nonsense no matter how well disguised it was. Some of his sharpest

arrows, however, were reserved for the Romantics. It was not so much hostility to the freedom conferred on poets and thinkers by the movement as the excesses to which it was prone, the morbidity which sullied it, the dangerous over-simplifications it encouraged. To all transcendental reveries, to all cults of the mysterious and the terrifying, to secret societies, eleutherarchs, esoteric doctrines, and mystic numbers he smilingly opposed good health and a sound digestion. He took a special delight in catching the enrapt exponent of some gnomic creed in an unguarded moment betraying his essential normality. For to Peacock, "the silver-haired old worldling," the extravagances of romantic thought and conduct were foolish excrescences that could be pruned away by laughter; at bottom, the Romantic was as normal as anyone else and just as fond of "three mutton chops well peppered."

Peacock's novels record the greatest massacre of the intellectual innocents since Rabelais—perfectibilians, deteriorationists, statu-quo-ites, transcendental philosophers, pantopragmatic experts, skull measurers, landscape gardeners and calamity mongers. Their follies are reproduced with serious fidelity and Peacock revels in his own brilliant *reductio ad absurdum* of their arguments. His humour is magical, his gaiety irresistible. His most Voltairian moments are mellow and his prose—for every speaker is a stylist—has the perfection of a cameo. His masters are Aristophanes, Lucian and Rabelais. Meredith, Norman Douglas and Aldous Huxley are in the direct line of descent. Confronted with such an *embarras de richesse*, it is difficult to quote; with so many excellences discrimination seems unfair. Peacock is a royal dish.

A certain young wit Benjamin Disraeli read his Peacock and not yet having found his way into politics thought statecraft a fair target for his boldest shafts of satiric fancy. The result was *The Voyage of Captain Popanilla* (1827).

The story begins on an idyllic, pre-Adamite island, Fantaisia, where the lovely inhabitants enjoy an Eden which, from its luscious green opulence, might have been designed by Bakst. Nothing disturbs the tranquil round of pleasure, for there is no manufacture, no commerce, no agriculture and no printing presses. "For corn Nature gives them breadfruit; and for intellectual amusement, they have a pregnant fancy and

a ready wit, tell inexhaustible stories and always laugh at each other's jokes."

But an unfortunate discovery nearly destroys their bliss. Popanilla, an hitherto blameless Fantaisian, finds on the sea-shore after a storm a box full of economic treatises of the Utilitarian School. He reads them, turns reformer, gathers disciples around him and offers to develop the island on modern lines. Learning that the development of utility is the object of our being and the attainment of this great end the cause of our existence, he proves that there is no utility in pleasure.

> If there were no utility in pleasure, it was quite clear that pleasure could profit no one. If, therefore, it were unprofitable, it was injurious; because that which does not produce a profit is equivalent to a loss; therefore pleasure is a losing business; consequently pleasure is not pleasant.

From his teachers, the Utilitarian philosophers, Popanilla further learns that

> man was not born for himself, but for society; that the interest of the body are alone to be considered, and not those of the individual; and that a nation might be extremely happy, extremely powerful, and extremely rich, although every individual member of it might at the same time be miserable, dependent and in debt.

The next stage in Popanilla's progress was to undertake the ideological conquest of the island. His disciples "being not utterly ignorant of some of the rudiments of knowledge, and consequently having completed their education, it was now their duty, as members of society, to instruct and not to study." With the result that the voices of lecturing boys resounded in every part of the Island. The ladies, who have suffered extreme neglect since Popanilla's campaign, appeal in despair to their king.

Popanilla is invited to expound his ideas, but the King, instead of handing over his island to the wild reformer, gives him a ship and bids him seek other islands.

> As the axiom of your school seems to be that everything can be made perfect at once, without time, without experience, without practice and without preparation, I

> have no doubt, with the aid of a treatise or two, you will make a consummate naval commander, although you have never been at sea in the whole of your life. Farewell, Captain Popanilla!

Thus dismissed, the rejected reformer is set adrift and eventually comes to Vraibleusia, the land of railways and machines, with its monstrous capital, Hubbabub. Disraeli draws a satirically unflattering picture of the London of 1827, describing its currency problems, the absurdities of competition, and the lust for colonies then just becoming vocal. He hits off the contradictions of British foreign policy in the fantastic incident of Sir Bombastes Furioso, who, in error, attacks his allies instead of the enemy. After vowing that the commander should pay for his mistake with his life, the gòvernment think it better to put a good face on the affair. Sir Bombastes is publicly described as

> a happy compound of the piety of Noah, the patriotism of Themistocles, the skill of Columbus, and the courage of Nelson; and his exploit styled the most glorious and unrivalled victory that was ever achieved, even by the Vraibleusians! Honours were decreed in profusion, a general illumination ordered for the next twenty nights, and an expedition immediately despatched to attack the right man.

The octopus squirearchy of the period aptly symbolized by the Aboriginal Inhabitant was a dangerously grim piece of satire for a young man with political aspirations.

A particularly happy vein of light-hearted satire was struck by Disraeli in *Ixion in Heaven* (1818) and *The Infernal Marriage* (1834)—all Lemprière and gold lace. Behind the delicately drawn Olympians were famous and more recent personages. The figure and coiffure of Jupiter recalled George the Fourth. Apollo, like Byron, was a dandy, terrified of getting fat and mortified when he could not dine on soda-water and a biscuit. His literary opinions are piquant:

> I do not think much of Homer. Homer was not esteemed in his own age, and our contemporaries are generally our best judges. The fact is, there are very few people who are qualified to decide upon matters of taste. A certain set, for certain reasons, resolves to cry up a certain writer, and the great mass soon join in. All is cant.

In this Regency heaven Mars is an officer on half pay and the Parcae are confirmed old maids. At time the satire becomes transparently topical. Tiresias is obviously Talleyrand. He trumps Proserpina's ace with the excuse: "I want the lead. And those who want the lead, please Your Majesty, must never hesitate about sacrificing their friends." All in all these two elegant trifles are a graceful offering to Lucian.

So the novel ends in the late eighteen twenties on a note of irresponsible gaiety not to be heard again until the "naughty nineties," a mocking, frivolous tribute to the world of Count D'Orsay and the enchanting Lady Blessington: a witty reflection of the shimmering London that was still an Elysium for its happier denizens.

CHAPTER 7

London by Gaslight

The rapidly changing social conditions in England during the first two decades of the Victorian era were reflected in the changing tastes of the novel-reading public. As a result of the Industrial Revolution the face of the country altered more in the next thirty years than it had done in the previous three hundred. Coaching inns and highwaymen disappeared as the grimy railways began to wind their way across the shires and counties, linking the sombre and monotonous industrial towns.

In London the delicate rose and grey architecture of elegant Regency streets and squares gave way to the encroachments of prison-like buildings and noisome alleys where dirty and malformed children screamed at their play. Corrosive fogs poured, chill and forbidding, along the Thames.

In 1807 Winsor, a German, first illumined Pall Mall with gas and with slow inevitability the murky atmosphere of the new industrialized London was stabbed at intervals by the flaring gas-jets caged for safety, that threw their sinister shadows across dark lanes flanked by the pitiable hovels of the poor. Canaletto's London was swallowed up in the London of Dickens, where a motley cavalcade in new, unbecoming clothes cavorted along the twisting quasi-medieval streets and passages of the old town. Down by the thriving docks amongst the gin shops a hideously squalid population struggled fiercely for existence in the free-for-all tragi-comedy of unenlightened self interest. Like a swiftly moving tide of grey scum the tenement houses of the poor began to cover the few remaining fields and meadows in the heart of the city.

These dramatic changes came during the lifetime of Charles Dickens, and his books mirror the transformation. Born in 1812—a period between Trafalgar and Waterloo—Dickens was always able to look back through a romantic haze of tears and laughter to the colour and spaciousness and the splendours of an easier way of life than the "hard times" in which he came to manhood. Long after the coming of the railways he remembered the old coaching inns with their fine napery, blazing log fires, good and ample fare—days

when there seemed to be a magic in the keen frosty air and when life assumed the wholesome benevolence of Mr. Pickwick himself. But if Dickens's heart was warmed by atavistic memories of an older semi-feudal society, his genius was quickened by the other England that was taking its place. This was the industrial England of grim cities where the poor died, worn out by hardship and despair, and where the bright hopes of youth were eclipsed by drudgery and squalor.

The social upheaval which was going on made fortunes for the successful and swept away the unfortunate. It also brought into existence a new body of middle-class readers. The Reform Act of 1832 gave a semblance of power and therefore importance to the middle class that was prospering in commerce and industry, and during the next forty years this class was to become the arbiter of literary taste, at any rate so far as the novel was concerned. On the whole it was a self-satisfied but ignorant and insular public for whom Dickens and Thackeray wrote, eager for knowledge, prejudiced, indifferent to the claims of art and imagination, sentimental and inclined to enjoy displays of moral didacticism. It liked to see virtue rewarded and vice punished and insisted on having the line between them sharply drawn. Impatient of uncertainties, it disliked having its prejudices questioned, preferring to have them confirmed.

This ever-growing reading public was neither liberal nor catholic in its tastes. In fact it was distinctly provincial. But many readers, although impatient of idleness and eccentricity, were fascinated by fashionable society while outwardly despising it and were quite ready to enjoy stories of "high life" so long as it was ultimately discredited.

In some ways the new reading public of the Victorian age resembled those who had welcomed Defoe a hundred and fifty years earlier. Like them, they were materialistic, eager for sensation, ready to learn and voracious in their appetites. A Victorian novelist had to be able to satisfy a multiplicity of tastes; he had to be a philosopher, humorist, psychologist, artist, to mingle slapstick and sentiment. Whether his medium was realism, fantasy, farce or pathos, he must be able to grip the imagination and entertain. Without exception the Victorian novelists were masters of the art of telling a story. Their serial methods might lead to lapses and repetition and were not conducive to fine art, but the story always gripped

and the reader hurried on to find out the next turn in a narrative that was rarely content with a single thread but wove a coloured web of intrigue. In such fiction climaxes were dramatic, characters boldly outlined and the atmosphere tense with excitement.

Book-selling by the middle of the century had become a major industry in which not only were large fortunes made but power exercised as well. Between 1830 and 1850 the prices of books fell sharply, and cheap miscellanies and serial pamphlets brought literature into the hands of those from whom the relatively high cost of other publications had hitherto kept it. A new race of publishers grew up alongside the older Ballantynes, Murrays and Constables, and popular writers struggled with the new men for a fair share of the profits that book-selling to the million was beginning to bring. A successful novelist like George Eliot was able to refuse an offer of ten thousand pounds for the copyright of *Romola*.

Many of these new readers had no instinctive traditions, they were unintellectual but not unintelligent ; often close observers and shrewd judges of human behaviour, they were, however, without self-criticism and unable to analyse their observations. They lacked the power to discover the laws that underlay their society, but they were keenly alive to its surface variations. Apt as these readers were to substitute judgment for understanding, it was far easier to make them feel than to make them think outside their conventional patterns. This is a possible explanation of the great popularity achieved by Dickens. He shared the limitations of his public; like his readers, he was a petty bourgeois; like them he allied quickness of native wit, keen observation and sentimentality to an interest in external characteristics. Like so many of his readers, he was a man of the town, of the New London. He sprang from the swift, rootless life of the London streets. He was an average nineteenth-century cockney; but he had genius.

A certain intolerance is inseparable from the rise of a new class to power, and the earnest, serious-minded Victorian was no exception. He was anxious to improve the world in his own way; he detested frivolity and sexual licence, especially in literature; and he desired to impose his own clear-cut prejudices on letters. Certain areas of human experience were strictly excluded by a form of prudery that still awaits its final

explanation, since before this time it was unknown. An unofficial censorship exercised by the circulating libraries was able to force the literature of the day to conform with middle-class standards. The public taste in fiction was virtually in the hands of Mudie, who as controller of a circulating library with twenty-five thousand subscribers, was considered a safe arbiter and was given what now seems a fantastic monopoly of judgment. If Mrs. Oliphant is to be believed, recognition by Mudie of one of her early books seemed to her like recognition from Heaven.

Not all Victorian novelists suffered to the same extent from the restrictive censorship exercised by public opinion. Certain fields of human experience such as mystery, romance and adventure, along with humour, lay almost entirely outside its scope. But on the subject of sex the taboo was absolute. Thackeray was perhaps most affected, and his work undoubtedly impaired. Nearest in spirit to the eighteenth century he recognized his kinship with Fielding and yearned for the old freedom. The preface to *Pendennis* records his *cri du coeur*, petulant and irritable, at the repressions suffered by the writer:

> Since the author of Tom Jones was buried no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a man. We must drape him and give him a conventional temper. Society will not tolerate the natural in our art. Many ladies have remonstrated and subscribers left me because in the course of the story I described a young man resisting and affected by temptation. My object was to say he had passions to feel, and the manliness and generosity to overcome them. You will not hear—it is best not to know—what moves in the real world; what is the life and talk of your sons.

The literary giant best fitted to feed this voracious, if inhibited, public was Charles Dickens, a sturdy individualist of no great depth of thought, but richly endowed with creative energy and showmanship. Dickens stands, by reason of the superb range of his characters, unrivalled among English novelists and invites comparison with Balzac and Dostoievski. Dickens is immortal because he is so essentially of his time.

The secret of his appeal to his own time has been stated with characteristic overemphasis by G.K. Chesterton :

> Dickens stands first as a defiant monument to what happens when a great literary genius has a literary taste akin to that of the community. For this kinship was deep and spiritual. Dickens did not write what the people wanted. Dickens wanted what the people wanted. And with this was connected that other fact which must never be forgotten, and which I have more than once insisted on, that Dickens and his school had a hilarious faith in democracy and thought of the service of it as a sacred priesthood. Hence there was this vital point in his popularism, that there was no condescension in it. The belief that the rabble will only read rubbish can be read between the lines of all our contemporary writers, even of those writers whose rubbish the rabble reads. ...Dickens never talked down to the people. He talked up to the people. He approached the people like a deity and poured out his riches and his blood. This is what makes the immortal bond between him and the masses of man....His power, then, lay in the fact that he expressed with an energy and brilliancy quite uncommon the things close to the common mind. But with the mere phrase the common mind, we collide with a current error. Commonness and the common mind are now generally spoken of as meaning in some manner inferiority and the inferior mind; the mind of the mere mob. But the common mind means the mind of all the artists and heroes; or else it would not be common. Plato had the common mind; Dante had the common mind; or that mind was not common. Commonness means the quality common to the saint and the sinner, to the philosopher and the fool; and it was this that Dickens grasped and developed.

Dickens did not possess the power of divining the inner working of his age but he succeeded in reflecting from a thousand facets its temporary saliences. It was an exciting, melodramatic, warmhearted, prodigal age, and Dickens was part of it. No other novelist showed such a gift for getting inside the skins of so many characters. Everything he touched came to life beneath his hand or seemed to, although today it may appear to some that what he endowed with the magic of life was in reality a puppet show – macabre and tinselled. As the Victorian age recedes into the past it can only be evoked through literature, and the image that sprawls in the pages of Dickens is fantastic and distorted. Perhaps the origin of this distortion must be sought in certain experiences of his life, in the personal factor the irritant that produced his genius.

The first years of Dickens's childhood were spent comfortably at Portsmouth, Portsea and Chatham, where his

father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The boy was able to visit the theatre, to buy books and steep himself in eighteenth-century fiction both picaresque and sentimental. Already he began to nourish day-dreams of acquiring the education of a gentleman and saw himself through the world of books becoming the heir of the centuries and moving with ease among the great ones of the past. But he was destined to have the dream rudely shattered by a turn of fortune as melodramatic as any in fiction.

His father, John Dickens, lived consistently beyond his means, got hopelessly into debt and was recalled to London. Charles, ignorant of the desperate plight of his family, followed and found them living in one of the poorest streets in Camden Town. In February 1824 his father was arrested for debt and carried off to the Marshalsea Prison. The situation of the family was serious; there was no money to buy bread and the boy was forced to pawn his precious books one by one. But worse was to come—an experience so bitter and humiliating that it continued to haunt him long after his genius had won for him a place in society denied him by his birth. His parents found a job for him in Warren's blacking factory, owned by a relative. For six months, in utter despair at the eclipse of his dreams, Dickens, still little more than a child, worked in the dirty, rat-infested old house down by the river—sticking labels on blacking bottles. To get the utmost benefit from the light that filtered through the dusty air the boys stood near the windows, where they aroused the interest of passers-by. This was the first raw impact of life on the sensitive nerves of a boy who had lived in the dream world of elegance and polite learning.

It might, with some truth, be said that Dickens never saw London. He saw only the carnival of horror that danced through his tortured imagination during this black period that brought him to the verge of despair. The nervous fits from which he had suffered in his childhood reappeared and he was frequently seized with violent spasms. From a psychological viewpoint, however, worse was to follow, for the boy experienced a sense of complete betrayal by those from whom he had most right to expect protection.

His father left prison and Dickens thought this would mean his own immediate release from shame and degradation. But the family were in no hurry to take the boy away from gain-

full employment and he remained in the factory until his father quarrelled with the relative who owned it and the boy was removed. Even then his mother was in favour of ending the quarrel and sending the boy back. Writing to Forster, years later, he says of this :

> I do not write resentfully or angrily; for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.

How deeply these few months burnt themselves in his memory is seen in the following passage :

> Until Hungerford Market was pulled down, until old Hungerford Stairs were destroyed, and the very nature of the ground changed, I never had the courage to go back to the place where my servitude began. I never saw it. I could not endure to go near it. For many years, when I came near to Robert Warren's in the Strand, I crossed over to the opposite side of the way, to avoid a certain smell of cement they put upon the blacking corks, which reminded me of what I was once. It was a very long time before I liked to go up Chandos Street. My old way home by the Borough made me cry, after my eldest child could speak.

By the time he was free to continue his education at Wellington House Academy the mischief was done. In the depths of Dickens's nature a split had occurred; a sensitive, delicate being had been plunged into experiences that could be borne only by the tough and obdurate, and the vision of a world of grim, twisted shapes, deformed, exaggerated caricatures, a world flickering with horrid images, impressed itself indelibly upon the soul of a child. It was through this window that he always saw the Victorian scene. Loving beauty, he had, in his most impressionable years, been forced into contact with the seamier side of life, with the dirt, squalor, shame and humiliation; and the resultant self-disgust and utter hopelessness were ineradicable. He had seen the sordid underworld of London, peopled by men and women diseased in mind and body, where the victims of some vast, incomprehensible system were oppressed and destroyed. He could not understand the economic fact that in the early-Victorian age the machinery of

life designed to control an aristocratic, agricultural and mercantile society was incapable of being geared to industrialism.

His own adolescent sufferings were turned to good account many years later in the semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*; but a great and universal pity for the poor and downtrodden had been awakened in him which was to provide the driving power behind his pen in book after book. It is also probable that the violence and sadism in his novels had their origin in the unresolved psychological tensions of this period, in the shock of disillusionment, and in the emotional conflicts occasioned by his attitude to his parents.

His sufferings did not make him a rebel against society. He was perhaps born too soon for that. Nor is there a *fin-de-siécle* longing for escape. No ivory tower claimed him, and Dickens did not turn away from a system that seemed to crush all human aspiration towards goodness and beauty. Instead he set out to reform the system through pity and laughter, but the topical purpose effectively limited his powers as an artist.

Success came early. Dickens, like his own David Copperfield, flung himself into learning shorthand, worked in a lawyer's office (watching, remembering, and collecting "copy"), educated himself in the British Museum Reading Room and eventually became parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. In 1836 he was asked by Chapman and Hall, the publishers, to write the letterpress for a set of cockney sporting prints which a popular artist, Seymour, was to illustrate. Having to rely almost entirely on imagination, for Dickens had no sporting memories or experiences, he hit upon the idea of inventing a genial, innocent and lovable old gentleman, Mr. Pickwick, who was to become world-famous as the founder of a club of harmless lunatics.

The suicide of the artist left Dickens free to pursue his own fancy, and one by one the lesser characters sprang to life and ran away with the story. In Sam Weller Dickens provided his quixotic hero with a faithful Sancho Panza, sparkling with cockney shrewdness and wit. Sam brought along his coachman father, Tony Weller, and Tony Weller was always followed by widows: "Mark my words, Sammy boy, more widows marry than single women." The vivacious Mr. Jingle kept joining the party, especially at mealtimes; and so it went on.

A whole new mythology came into being, until the public could hardly wait for each new instalment. Lower middle-class life in the nineteenth century was to Dickens what the Border country had been to Scott—at once a source of inspiration and an inexhaustible storehouse of types and material.

After four or five parts of Mr. Pickwick's adventures had appeared the work suddenly sprang into popularity which each succeeding part carried higher and higher. Four hundred copies of the first part were prepared, but for the fifteenth forty thousand copies were needed. The British public took the club of harmless lunatics to its bosom, repeated what the member said, quoted them, appealed to their judgements, and found itself confirmed and strengthened. The Pickwickians had become a national institution, and "Dickensian" humour passed into the language. Dickens's pen, like Scott's, was a fertile one. No sooner had a vein of fiction been opened up than it seemed inexhaustible. The immense vitality he poured into his books made them seem—as G.K. Chesterton pointed out—less like separate novels than lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substances called Dickens. In such a generous harvest there are inevitably tares among the wheat—stagey characters, slapdash work, and, to a later generation, serious lapses of taste.

Pickwick had been an essay in pure humour, a series of entertaining episodes lightly strung together. But Dickens was aware of the contrast between the atavistic memories they evoked and the cruetly and injustice in the world around him. In the novels that followed *Pickwick* he took on the familiar role of the crusader. His aim was to wring the conscience of society by playing upon its feelings and presenting scenes of harrowing misery that could be shown as the outcome of personal indifference and social callousness.

It must be remembered that what seems today the over-drawn and laboured sentimentality of his children's death-bed scenes wrung the hearts of his own contemporaries. Looking back and speaking through the mouth of David Copperfield, with complete simplicity, Dickens explained his own success and his own philosophy: "Whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well." If heart, rather than judgment, is taken as a criterion, even the death-beds are understandable.

As a crusader for the oppressed, Dickens first attacked the stony-heartedness of organised charity. In *Oliver Twist* (1838) he showed that the Poor Law Reform Act had only strengthened institutionalism by giving authority to unkindness. In Mr. Bumble all selfish dispensers of public charity stand condemned, and in *Oliver Twist* their helpless victims find an eternal symbol. For Oliver to have become a national byword as the small boy who dared to ask for a second helping is a measure of the impact of his story on the well-fed and complacent reading public. An even worse shock was to come later, in *Bleak House*, when young Jo, typifying the utterly destitute everywhere, dies of hunger. "Dead," said Dickens, the moralizer, of his little crossing sweeper. "Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day."

Nicholas Nickleby (1839) exposed the goings-on behind the doors of private schools. Next came *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), perhaps best remembered for the overstrained emotionalism of the death of Little Nell—the angel child, too good to live, a scene which provided contemporary readers with one of the highlights of fiction, but which a less sentimental age has damned to perdition. To offset the pathos of the child and her loving but wretched grandfather we have the creation of Quilp, a character impregnated with malice and wearing physical ugliness as the outward sign of spiritual repulsiveness.

A visit to America in 1842 resulted in bitter disappointment for Dickens. He had expected too much. There in a free republican State he believed he would meet with more natural goodness, equality and justice than he saw at home. Instead he found disgusting manners, a crudity that repelled him and a venality unrivalled even in Europe. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) records his disillusionment. American scenes in it gave offence, but the book is memorable for its characters. Sarah Gamp ("He'd make a lovely corpse"), Tom Finch, the Franciscan Mark Tapley, and that prince of hypocrites Pecksniff, make the novel a favourite with English readers.

Dickens's peculiar power to reveal the spirit through the flesh is admirably brought out in his description of Pecksniff:

> It has been remarked that Mr. Pecksniff was a moral

> man. So he was. Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr. Pecksniff; especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer that he had a Fortunatus purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds which fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. He was a most exemplary man: fuller of virtuous precept than a copy-book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there; but these were his enemies, the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie, for he fastened it behind), and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace, a holy calm pervades me." So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-grey which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eyeglass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, "Behold the moral Pecksniff."

By 1850 Dickens had added to his output the Christmas Tales including *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50). The first of these is Dickens's touch-stone. It is a miracle play. The little cripple, Tiny Tim, is not a realy little boy like David, puzzled, loving and trying to learn his way about the world. He is youth and innocence personified, just as Scrooge typifies the lovelessness of the miser. In the warm glow of the Christmas spirit, ugliness and evil vanish, and Scrooge is transformed by the all-pervading benevolence and goodwill in the very air about him. It may seem a far cry from Dickens to Shelley, but there is something in common between the lyrical epilogue to *Prometheus Unbound* where a universe is filled with radiant harmony by the triumph of love and the transformed heart of the crabbed Scrooge giving renewed hope to the little cripple, Tiny Tim.

The earlier novels had been constructed to no very definite plan. They are mostly picaresque, the hero acting as the

connecting link between one episode and the next. In *Dombey and Son* there is a central theme. It is not so much the sombre figure of Mr. Dombey who holds the story together, as the cold pride of Mr. Dombey—destroying the lives of those with whom he comes in contact. There is considerable poetic imagination and truth in the scene in the desolate house, where Dombey is left alone, the muddy footmarks which symbolize his own path through life, as he has trampled on the affection of his daughter, Flo, in revenge for the loss of his son, Paul.

Of *David Copperfield* Dickens wrote: "I like this one the best," and the novel may be regarded as a veiled autobiography. In the chapters covering David Copperfield's childhood Dickens showed an imaginative understanding of the child's point of view that was new in literature. The bewilderment of a little boy, at the mercy of adult decisions and their unpredictable whims, is described with a tenderness which must have surprised families where well-brought-up children were locked in dark cupboards for the slightest display of "naughtiness."

Bleak House, which followed in 1853, is a tragedy which, in tragic intensity, far surpasses the gloomy history of Mr. Dombey. Suggested by the celebrated proceedings arising from the estate of one William Jennings, who died in 1798, leaving property at Birmingham worth many millions, the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is a commentary, at once tragic and satiric, on the abuses of the old courts of Chancery, the delays and costs of which brought misery and ruin on its suitors. The plot is intricately woven, and the central theme so skilfully used, that every episode and every character has something to contribute to the inexorable chain of events leading towards the exposure of Lady Dedlock. But surpassing this is the force of symbolism in the novel. In fact in this sombre story of hearts worn to despair and minds driven to madness by the inscrutable injustice and infinite delays of the Law there is much to call to mind the world of Dostoievski, while the powerful intensity with which symbol and plot are fused is reminiscent of Kafka.

From the physical fog that blots out the city Dickens passes to the dreadful nights of spiritual darkness that is at its thickest and most terrible in the workings of a system of Law that has lost touch with human needs.

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and medows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the water-side pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of the collier-brigs; fog lying out in the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog dropping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. . . .
>
> Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandmen and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time – as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.
>
> The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.

Through the fog of frustration and throughout the book the two Wards in Chancery, and others connected with them, grope their way. Poor little Miss Flite has already lost her reason, and gradually it becomes clear that as Richard Carstone's golden optimism wavers towards despair, he too will be driven mad, or rather that he will escape into madness from an unbearable agony of uncertainty. For

> This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted land in every shire; which has its wornout lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might, the means of wearying out the righ; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honourable man among it practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!"

Dickens the social reformer tilted at the vast, apathetic and incomprehensible web woven by a legal system that had lost touch with reality, but the story seems to have taken

possession of him and far surpasses the original purpose. It also inspired him to the creation of some of his best characters. Dickens, often so unsuccessful with the delineation of educated men and women, has several in this book who are more or less convincing. The best of all is Sir Leicester Dedlock—ludicrous, stiff and inarticulate, but in his utter moral integrity by no means a caricature of the English ruling classes. The suave lawyer Tulkinghorn and the shy philanthropist Mr. Jarndyce are both rather more than types. There are a host of interesting minor characters, among whom may be mentioned Harold Skimpole, drawn from Leigh Hunt, who disguises his complete selfishness under a guise of childish irresponsibility. The irascible yet generous Boythorn, with his canary, is drawn from Walter Savage Landor.

Dickens's powers of characterization were limited. Apart from the obviously stagey and melodramatic figures, he is apt to carry the reader away by sheer quantitative achievement. On closer analysis many of his immortal creations turn out to be not real persons, but brilliantly sketched personifications of vices and virtues, reminiscent of the "humours" of Ben Jonson. In *Bleak House*, however, even a minor character like Mrs. Bagnet is not just a soldier's wife; she is Mrs. Bagnet and nobody else. Sometimes it is hard to differentiate. Mrs. Jellyby might be a type—the kind of woman who neglects her home in order to work for a mission to Borrioboola-Gha; but again Dickens's intense powers of observation and love of detail come in to save her. She is unique as the slatternly housewife whose curtains were skewered back with forks!

In *Hard Times* (1854), a novel instinct with power, he returned to the attack on the industrial evils of his day, epitomizing in Coketown all industrial towns and in the Gradgrinds and the Bounderbys howing up the inhuman representatives of the system of enlightened self-interest that had only theory to recommend it.

The target in *Little Dorrit* (1857) is the unreformed Civil Service, with its nepotism and its injustices. Here the dice are loaded against the Circumlocution Offices and the human Barnacles who make the system work but whose selfishness and indifference destroy the soul in the society they serve.

With *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) Dickens returned to the historical novel, a genre which he had already essayed in

Barnaby Rudge, a story of the Gordon Riots. His limitations are soon disclosed when he strays outside the magic London circle in which he conjured up his fantastic rout. His attitude to the French Revolution suggests the fundamental dualism at the root of Dickens's political convictions, which made him, for instance, although a radical, an opponent of the Chartists because he hated physical violence. "The aristocrats deserved all they got, but the passion engendered in the people by the misery and starvation replaced one set of oppressors by another." His sympathies were with the suffering, but he feared violence, for it stirred in him deep-rooted emotional complexes that had their origin in his adolescence and had never been resolved.

To the last phase of Dickens's literary career belongs *Great Expectations* (1861), a work regarded by many critics as his best. The story of the benevolent convict, his protegé young Pip, the proud Estella and the tragically eccentric Miss Havisham is well told, while the description of the Great Salt Marsh where Pip first meets the convict creates an atmosphere of cold horror that invites comparison with Hardy's study of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*.

Three years later came *Our Mutual Friend* (1864), a mellow and charming book, noteworthy for the interesting character of the schoolmaster, Bradly Headstone, the first murderer in Dickens to exhibit any complexity of character. And he is the first to present himself as a member of respectable Victorian society. The novel contains a dreadful and convincing picture of the double life led by Bradley Headstone as he goes about his duties as a schoolmaster after he has decided to murder Eugene, for whom the woman he loves has manifested a preference.

At the time of his death in 1870 Dickens was working on what might be called a psychological thriller, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Eastern influences which were beginning to affect literature are seen in the character of Jasper Drood, the opium-smoker, Kali-worshipper, and choirmaster and precentor of Cloisterham Cathedral. This is one of Dickens's more complex character-studies, and may contain much unconscious self-analysis. Perhaps Dickens comes near to revealing the split in his own personality in emphasizing Jasper's two states of consciousness that never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were

continuous instead of broken.

The murderer, Drood, has lived all his life in an atmosphere of sanctity, worshipping the Christian God, singing hymns and directing the devotions of others, but his other self has surrendered to the enchantment of evil, embodied in an alien civilization, drugs, and hallucinations. Oddly enough, Dickens had spent his life writing novels full of goodwill, sentiment, high spirits and kindliness, but the most vivid experiences related in them were all inspired by evil, violence, malignity, cruelty. It has been suggested that Dickens himself was perhaps caught between two classes of society as the choirmaster between two civilizations, and in both cases the conflict resulted in a strong impulse to destroy. Dickens the artist sublimated his evil passions in the nerve-torturing scenes of sadism he depicted; Drood committed murder.

All his life Dickens drove himself hard – perhaps too hard. At the height of his fame he was not only writing and editing, but also giving dramalic readings from his books in both England and America. These brought him money and also a certain emotional satisfaction. In the idolatrous applause of a vast audience, throbbing with excitement as he threw all his considerable histrionic skill into making them see the death of Bill Sykes or the murder of Nancy, Dickens found the anodyne he needed to soothe past hurts that time had hidden but not healed.

His death was sudden and dramatic. On 9 June, 1870, he had put in a long day on *Edwin Drood*, when he had a stroke while he was eating dinner. He got up from the table in his stunned condition and said he must go to London; then he fell to the floor and never recovered consciousness. He died the next afternoon.

Perhaps Dickens's major contribution to literature, that which gives him his rank among the giants, was his discovery of new sources of humour. Like Smollett, the greatest literary influence on him, he saw the humour of funny faces. A child who was asleep in a room in which Dickens was writing later recalled how, waking up suddenly, she saw the novelist make faces at himself in the looking-glass and then return to his desk and continue his work.

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uneducated in sentences from which they can only extricate themselves by means of more and more ralative clauses. He went far beyond Smollett in the supreme sophistication which can see childish fun in the contrariness of inanimate objects. The "veskitt" button that won't button was something new in English literature—it suggests something of the Russian Gcgol. Dickens exploited to the full the absurdity of the apt or ludicrously unsuitable name, and he loved to mock the humour of the professional outlook—the overriding egotism which makes an undertaker say that a beautiful funeral is something to "reconcile us to the world we live in."

A clue to Dickens's gift of portraiture is to be found in his confession that he used to console himself for his small troubles when a boy by impersonating his favourite characters in the novels he read.

> I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch.... I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church steeple; I have watched Strap with a knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle in the parlour of our little village alehouse.

Dickens's approach to character was that of the actor, not that of the philosopher or the psychologist. An actor who is also a fine artist. He observed from the outside, he built up character boldly and swiftly, catching the salient features, and his cut-and-thrust method triumphed because it resulted in something unforgettably vivid. Life was always surprising him and forcing him to keep in a state of constant excitement about it. Dickens did not need the co-operation of the reader, he only wanted his delighted approval. Nothing is suggested; everything is clearly presented. It is as if Dickens caught life grimacing and clicked the shutter - the result is both ludicrous and lifelike. Versatility is not the greatest form of art, but at a Dickensian level it may not be despised.

Genius he had in plenty, but it was untutored, and the restless fertility in contriving situations and inventing characters was never pruned by concern for form. Dickens added little to the development of the novel; it remained in his hands what it had been in the eighteenth century, a picaresque

tale with a moral bias or the happy blending of drama and narration. Perhaps the author was less intrusive than formerly and the marshalling of climaxes undertaken at more breathless speed, but Dickens discloses no conscious artistic purpose—he appears quite indifferent to the medium he uses.

Apart from his supreme value as an entertainer in fiction Dickens earned the gratitude of posterity for awakening the social conscience. In an age marred by callousness and complacency Dickens never lost faith in fundamental human goodness. Although he could see with clear eyes the stronger impersonal evil created by society, he continued to believe in the kindly fatherhood of God and in the triumphant power of love. Organization, whether political, charitable or religious, he rejected; the law killed, and spirit and systems, no matter how efficient, were no substitutes for the warm human relationships that were based on man's responsibility for his fellows. In his ideal of spontaneous benevolence flowing from some inexhaustible fountain of human goodness Dickens saw the great solvent of the grief and misery that poisoned life around him.

Dickens is the Victorian age in fiction, or a large part of it He shared its faults of taste, its love of melodrama, its exuberant vitality, its belief in the sharp division of humanity into sheep and goats. He shared, too, the innate optimism of the period. His novels, humour apart, are morality plays in which the good angels win the battle for the soul of man, which is just what the majority of the Victorians were sure they would.

Thackeray, who was Dickens's contemporary and great rival for popular favour, lacked alike his weakness and his genius. Much that Dickens hungered after—culture, social position, breeding—was his by right, and he had a great gift for writing dialogue, a strong sense of irony, and a style "easy and sympathetic, carved in slow soft curves." Rather unkindly, Thackeray has been called the "apostle of medio-crity," although this might be regarded as a tribute to his masterly naturalism in fiction. He recognized Dicken's skill in narration, which made his own seem flat and unexciting.

> Boz tells a good palpable story. I know the tune I am piping is a very mild one ... only a homely story. ... Yet look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one

knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel hat.

Thackeray was less interested in the great upheavals of the age than in the manners and morals of the *beau monde* around him: "Yes," he says in effect, "this is Vanity Fair; not a moral place certainly, nor a merry one, though very noisy."

As a so-called moralist, William Makepeace Thackeray came into his stride slowly. Born in India in 1811, he was educated at Charterhouse, and Trinity College, Cambridge. Finding that academic distinction had less appeal than a butterfly existence on the Continent, he left the University after one year, and moved to Coblenz and Weimar. For a time he considered taking up a study of law, but found the training "one of the most cold-blooded prejudiced pieces of invention that ever man was slave to."

An inheritance of eight hundred pounds a year enabled him to bid farewell to the law and he set off for Paris. There he read widely, studied the language and revelled in the freedom and excitement provided by the gayest city in the world. Bubbling over with kindness and good humour—he was just twenty-one—his powers of enjoyment at their height, Thackeray plunged into the sparkling whirlpool, and found life good. It was apparently too good to last. Some unlucky speculations by his stepfather, Major Carmichael Smythe—later to be immortalized as Colonel Newcome—accounted for the loss of the young man's fortune as well as his own, and Thackeray was forced to face the unpleasant necessity of earning a living.

His first efforts met with no success. Under a Dickensian prodigality of *noms de plume*—Yellowplush, Titmarsh, Gahagan, Fitzboodle—he began to contribute articles and stories, often illustrated by himself, to periodicals. His fortunes reached their nadir in 1835 and he was so self-distrustful that he lay on a sofa reading endless novels, and declaring, "If in another six months I can do no better I will go out and hang myself."

He was roused from this *Oblomov* mood and provoked into a more sustained effort by disgust at a contemporary taste for crime novels in which the hero was a glamourized villain. Moved by sentimental pity for the victims of an unjustly harsh penal code, certain writers of fiction had begun to

champion the criminal against society. Among examples of this dangerous tendency to condone the brutalities of the criminal while attacking the harshness of the penal code were Lytton's *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram.*

When Harrison Ainsworth joined the "gallows" school with *Rookwood* (1834) and *Jack Sheppard* (1840), combining much spurious sentimental rhetoric with echoes of the Gothic terror, Thackeray brought up bigger guns with *Barry Lyndon* (1844), in which the hero, gambler, villain and bully, describes his own baseness with blatant self-complacency. The irony implicit throughout is also explained in footnotes, but the subject remains unrelievedly painful. The book is chiefly interesting for the character-drawing. Barry Lyndon is drawn in the round, and is far more than a Jonsonian humour. He is not just a monster of vice. He may throw a carving-knife about, but he feels the action needs justification : "I was drunk, as anyone could see."

After further literary ventures and a spell in Paris as foreign correspondent for the newspapers his father launched so optimistically and so vainly, Thackeray wrote *Vanity Fair*, a book that brought him immediate fame and established him high among the great Victorians.

Here at last was an authentic picture of the upper middle classes who lived in the big new Bloomsbury squares, presented with clear-sighted realism and sparkling irony. Society in the eighteenth forties was becoming fluid owing to the influx of wealth. The new fortunes made in the City, in India and in industry, were storming the old social fortresses. Everyone wanted to get in, but the only assured passports were birth and wealth. *Vanity Fair* is the story of a woman who had neither. Instead Becky Sharp had brilliant green eyes, a ruthless determination to get on in life, a hard, calculating mind, no kindliness or humour, but unfailing good temper. Infinitely more gifted than the fortunate ones around her, the poor pupil from Miss Pinkerton's Academy demanded her share of the prizes of life. Becky's bohemian nature is fascinated by the flashing magnificence of the social scene. In her imagination she has a right to wealth and position ; but the princess *de jure* is only the governess *de facto.*

Becky Sharp was something new in fiction. Since Defoe's Roxana the novel had known only the colourless conventional heroines of romance or the repulsive caricatures that Smollett

perfected. Here was an adventuress with the world as her oyster, a study in instinctive trickery, inherent duplicity and the supple energy of the eternal feminine—the adventuress who scandalized and conquered her world. Becky, by her marriage to Rawdon Crawley, scaled the social ladder and rose to dizzy heights of social distinction; but the ladder was a magic one and could withdraw itself at will. At the first breath of disapproval it vanished, for society extends little tolerance or protection to those whose right to its patronage does not rest on an accepted foundation.

It is noticeable that Thackeray gives his favourite characters good entrances. Becky is first seen flinging Johnson's Dictionary out of the carriage window as she leaves Miss Pinkerton's Academy for ever. Beside her glowing personality the true heroine, Amelia, seems, then and throughout the book, a dull and colourless foil. She is tender, sentimental, stupid and loving—all feminine characteristics Thackeray greatly admired—along with "adorable purity," maternal love, lack of self-confidence, an angelic ignorance of men's ways and a proper touch of female jealousy. Such asides to the reader as "If the women did not make idols of us, and if they saw us as we see each other, would life be bearable, or could society go on?" tend to date him. There had been many Amelias before, but Becky, the indefatigable, scandalous little Becky, was a creation that owed nothing to literature but a good deal to life.

Contrasting the two women, Thackeray brings out the realistic philosophy of human nature and the fallacies behind too sharp a distinction between sheep and goats. The good are often blind, powerless and foolish, while the unscrupulous are full of passionate intensity, and extremely able. It is, however, when he sees conventional morality and the ritual of society confronted by the weakness of the flesh that the perceptions of Thackeray become luminous and his pen moves with deadly precision. Here lies the source of his incisive irony that delighted to reveal a truth so often ignored by Victorian moralists. Lust and cowardice are the targets for his keenest shafts. Men, he maintained, were rarely heroes, and when they were it was through chance rather than by design. This point of view gives significance to his version of the battle of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*. Ignoring the heroics of the battlefield, he concentrates on the confused, panic-stricken civilians

in Brussels. Under the impact of fear all the unseen undercurrents of self-love are forced to the surface. Becky, who has kept her horses, can thus take an exquisite revenge on Lady Bareacres, who has humiliated her socially, by refusing her ladyship the horses so essential for her flight. The horses again are used to reveal the selfish cowardice of Joe Sedley. He is willing to buy them and fly, leaving his sister with no protector.

> What good can I do her, suppose—suppose the enemy arrive? They'll spare the women, but my man tells me that they have taken an oath to give no quarter to the men – the dastardly cowards.

Thackeray derives much of his realism from his discipline. He tends to avoid over-dramatic climaxes, observing that life has a fondness for understatement and undertones. Impending tragedy is often averted by unimportant trifles or precipitated into insignificance by an elusive nuance. Herein lies the great difference in style between Dickens, who loves to marshal his characters to some overwhelming climax, and Thackeray. To gain the measure of this difference it is only necessary to imagine how Dickens would have handled Rawdon Crawley's discovery of Becky and Lord Steyne.

Thackeray's next novel, *Pendennis* (1848-50), is autobiographical, with his school, Charterhouse, somewhat idealized as Greyfriars. Among many amusing characters in the story is Captain Shandon, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gezette*, who drafts his first prospectus in the Fleet, a prison.

Henry Esmond (1852) is a historical novel, and to some the best in the language. Written in a style of easy urbanity, it evokes the age of Queen Anne—the world of Swift, Steele, Harley and Bolingbroke, the world of the dastardly Mohocks, the notorious Lord Mohun and his most distinguished victim, the Duke of Hamilton. The story, concerned with an eccentric Catholic family, loyal to the Stuarts, is presented against a contemporary background of political and religious bigotry. In Beatrix Esmond, with her dazzling beauty and tonedeafness to all emotion, Thackeray drew another of the vampire women of whom he disapproved in principle but whose fascinations inspired his greatest creative efforts. Ill-fortune may overtake them in the end, but there is no blame for the leopard who

"follows leopard law." Compared with Beatrix the virtuous and unblemished Lady Castlewood is boring and insipid, although she arouses in her creator an obvious tenderness Esmond, melancholy languishing on his eyelashes, and full of pathetic resignation, is surely the least vital hero in fiction The last scenes, written with white-hot irony, show Beatrix impelled by vanity, ruining the Stuart cause for which her brother has risked his life.

The Newcomes (1853-5) contributed to fiction in the person of Colonel Newcome an idealized portrait of Thackeray's stepfather, a simple-minded gentleman, guided through life solely by the sentiments of duty and honour. A generation able to thrill to the snowflakes that attended the death of Little Nell was equally touched by the pathos of the Colonel's deathbed. "Adsum" passed into the language of devotional sentimentality.

Thackeray's last novel, *The Virginians* (1859), relates the fortunes of the descendants of Colonel Henry Esmond, and in particular of his daughter Rachel, who married a Warrington (ancestor of the friend of Pendennis) and survived him as owner of an estate in Virginia. The book contains a vivid account of the rakish and unprincipled society of the day and introduces Wolfe and Washingion. The later part deals with the American War of Independence.

Thackeray died in 1863 at the relatively early age of fifty-two, worn out by his efforts. Love of extravagant living and a laudable desire to provide generously for his daughters led him, in spite of his temperamental lethargy, to force up his income to the ten-thousand-pounds-a-year level. To this end he undertook lecture tours in England and America. In both countries he was a great success. Fashionable society attended his lectures and echoed his opinions. In one lecture he damned Swift so effectually that a disrelish for the greatest English satirist became a hallmark of good taste for a generation. Yet, strangely enough, Thackeray had much in common with Swift ; perhaps he feared the terrible consequences of looking at life too long and too steadily without the comforting assurances of illusion.

Among novelists a high place must be assigned to Thackeray in spite of his indifference to form and his lack of intensity. In his work he rejected the complicated plot used by Dickens, allowing his story—usually spread out over a

period of several years—to develop through the actions and speech of his characters. The characters themselves are plausible, no distressing sense of caricature mars their naturalness, but their innermost thoughts are not revealed, for Thackeray failed to develop a technique of self-analysis. He makes up for this to some extent by his subtle use of dialogue. Like Jane Austen, he is a master of eloquent reticence, and he can give a double edge to the most seemingly harmless comment. Sentiment he portrays with far greater delicacy than Dickens; he avoids the charge of vulgarity so often brought against his contemporary, and if he is compelled to describe the sordid – as in the account of Becky's fall into the demi-monde of cheap Continental hotels —he does it with ironic detachment.

Thackeray's strength lies in his power to persuade the reader that the play of action in a novel rises straight out of character, so that the course of events has the inevitability of life. Like Tolstoy, he can express a sense of life larger than that which is confined within the story. Just as he, the author, can draw aside his chair and speak to the reader, so do his characters appear to have a life of their own outside the limits of their appearances in the story. This sense of reality is aided by the trick of letting the same character appear in several novels.

His weaknesses spring from the limitations imposed on him by the age in which he lived and from which he consciously suffered. His insight into the workings of human nature was profound but satiric, and for its full expression required an atmosphere of freedom. But this freedom was precisely what he lacked and, in consequence, a tension developed between Thackeray's creative inspiration and the Victorian age. The Victorian age triumphed, with the result that the novelist was compelled to be false to his own genius. Thackeray's artistic perception of characters and situations was, within his range, infallible, but the power to set down what he saw was cramped by a somewhat pharisaical moral code. That he submitted so readily to his age is the measure of his weakness.

Chief among the minor contemporaries of Dickens and Thackeray were Anthony Trollope, Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins.

Trollope (1815-82) is a Victorian novelist whose writings

have enjoyed a considerable revival in the twentieth century. He is a garrulous male Jane Austen, as satisfied with society, and blandly unaware of the storms and stresses introduced by Darwin and Marx, as she of the distress occasioned by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

Trollope, educated at Harrow and Winchester, succeeded (thanks to an unexacting examination system) in establishing himself in the Post Office, and was sent, in connection with his duties, to Ireland as a travelling inspector. As a writer he might be described as an industrious philistine who quickly acquired a routine that enabled him to write at any time and anywhere. Much of his literary work was done while he was travelling about the countryside. Irish life interested him and contemporary Irish affairs provided material for his early novels, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847) and *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848). *Castle Richmond* (1860) records the famine in 1846-7, of which he had been an eye-witness.

The almost idolatrous admiration of Trollope in the nineteen thirties and forties was not, however, inspired by the Irish novels but by his studies of English clerical life *The Warden* (1855), *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Doctor Thorne* (1859) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). These novels reflect the cathedral world that is peculiarly English, a world of seeming calm, a "twilight of gray Gothic things" that yet seethes with intrigue below the surface. The idea of these stories is said to have come to him in the shadow of Salisbury Close while he was meditating on some contemporary scandal concerning a misappropriation of church funds. Suddenly he had a glimpse of a world within a world, outwardly placid, with dignity unruffled, but, in point of fact, tense and grim, stiff with *amour propre*, where attack and counter-attack were launched with quixotic enthusiasm and an unchristian lack of charity.

The time was ripe for the "Anglican" novel. Hunting persons and comfortable pluralists, whose cellars were frequently dearer to them than their libraries, had long been threatened by the Wesley movement, which was spreading rapidly in the nineteenth century. By the eighteen fifties new forces were attacking the Church from without and feuds were disintegrating it from within. Rome, Calvin and the scientists were alike menacing the Anglican order. No easy

way of restoring lost prestige offered itself ; older dignitaries resented the new men whose reforming zeal and anxiety to achieve success at any price led them to treat the Church as merchandise. No writer, not even Dickens, was as sensitive as Trollope to the idiom, idiosyncrasies and snobbery of the clerical profession. He possessed a microscopic eye for their peculiarities. But what interested him were not the fiercely contested points of doctrine that were dividing the age, but individuals. Few writers have caught the faint, musty flavour of cathedral town personalities as well as he.

The masterpiece of the series is undoubtedly *Barchester Towers*, which is rich in finely conceived characters: the gentle and innocent Mr. Harding ; the superb and slightly unapproachable Dr. Grantley, his son-in-law ; the odious and insufferable Slope, so justly punished for his interfering perfidy by having to turn Methodist in order to marry a rich widow ; the pathetic and faintly ridiculous curate, Quiverful, and his fierce, maternal wife : all are beyond criticism as ecclesiastical "types." But Trollope surpassed himself in the creation of the Bishop's wife—the She-Bishop, Mrs. Proudie. She belongs to the realm of high comedy ; like Barchester itself she is at once temporal and eternal. The scene when she is discomfited by her arch-enemy, Mr. Slope, and the Bishop, milder than any worm, turns at last and asserts himself, is among the great moments in the history of the Comic Spirit.

Certain emotions—pride, arrogance, spite and envy—Trollope understood supremely well and presented in fiction with quiet authenticity. Their appearance in the lives of those whose business it was to have banished them provided a rich store of satiric material for his pen. But Trollope was no thinker : he did not criticize the world he depicted ; he could never have seen in the Church of England of his day the "musical banks," beautiful but useless, that Samuel Butler saw and satirized. Keenly observant and passionately interested in individuals, Trollope imposes on them an uncomplex and unified organization. He identified himself with the nineteenth century governing class, and reflected it admiringly. All that was tranquil in Victorian England preened itself in the pages of Trollope ; class loyalties, class tolerance and class distinction he accepted unquestioningly, for him the pillars of society were still the country gentry and the Church. Like Jane Austen, he was a snob, but perhaps he showed just a shade

more understanding of curates.

Charles Kingsley (1819-75), whose popularity has waned in the twentieth century, was inspired to protest against the domestic insipidities—or so they seemed to him—of Anthony Trollope. He wanted in the novel stirring episodes, varied excitement and a past that seemed richer in colour than the drab futilities of contemporary Victorian cathedral towns.

In *Hypatia* (1853) his subject is Alexandria in the time of the Goths, and in *Westward Ho* ! (1855) the Elizabethan age of the seadogs—Drake and Hawkins and the *Golden Hind*.

Returning to the contemporary scene in *Alton Locke* (1850), the biography of a converted Chartist, he exposes conditions in the sweated tailoring trade. Kingsley, like Dickens, had been impressed by Carlyle's attacks on the economics of the Manchester school. He accepted industrialism and, as a good Victorian, he believed in progress; but he wanted it to be Christian progress. Fired with reforming zeal, Kingsley crusaded against dishonest traders, sweated industries, hypocritical creators of slums and disease, and the eternal enemies of social hygiene. Today he is remembered less for his historic novels and for his books of social propaganda, *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, than for his fantasy *The Water Babies*. In this a political fairy story about a dirty little chimney sweep, who dies, and goes to a dream-like after-world under the sea, Kingsley carried on the onslaught of the reformers against the evils of industrialism.

Charles Reade (1814-84)—the novelist with a notebook—added documentation to the novel as a weapon for the social reformer. He investigated prisons, and studied tool-making, the law business, banking, even life between the decks on an ocean steamer. He also found out what life was like for Australian gold-diggers. He describes his methods of gathering material in *A Terrible Temptation*. The results of his experience and his reading were poured into his novels; and when he turned from the present to the past he remained faithful to the habit of minute and detailed realism. Reade was an admirable story-teller. Novels such as *Peg Woffington* (1853), *Hard Cash* (1863), *Griffith Gaunt* (1866), an exciting story of adventure with an anti-Catholic bias, and *Foul Play* (1869), a good example of Reade's narrative power, are still of some interest.

His masterpiece, however, *The Cloister and the Hearth*

(1861), is a historical romance. The story, which is laid in the fifteenth century, was inspired by the author's reading of the *Colloquies* and the *Life of Erasmus,* and writings of Froissart and Luther. Vivid scenes in monasteries, taverns and palaces characterize this stirring tale of Renascence Europe on the eve of the Reformation, and of the father of Erasmus, who became a Dominican friar on hearing a false account of the death of the mother of his child. In spite of the blue book accuracy there is not a trace of true objectivity in *The Cloister and the Hearth,* for prejudice and Victorian earnestness made him turn the story into an attack on the hated Catholic Church and its enforced celibacy of the clergy.

Mrs. Gaskell (1810-65), best known as the author of *Cranford* and as the biographer of Charlotte Blonte, joined the social crusaders by describing conditions, as she had seen them in Manchester, in *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855). *Cranford,* often read and loved as a charming and idyllic period piece, shows the repercussion of Big Business on two small-town sisters. A bank fails, and they are ruined, though obliged by the conventions of the day to keep the flag of gentility proudly flying. Miss Matty, burning two candles alternately, so that any chance visitor will assume that she can afford to burn two at once, has been clearly observed and recorded as a victim of an economic revolution.

As a counterblast against the socialist and radical tendencies of the time Disraeli in his later novels set forth a new political doctrine—the young England policy of the enlightened Tory democrats. A sturdy supporter of feudal responsibility, Disraeli feared the consequences of Liberal individualism, which seemed to be destroying social harmony and replacing it by the harsh creed of class warfare. Poverty and discontent, the reverse side of economic progress and industrialism, were threatening to endanger public order. The novel with a purpose had long been popular and now it began to grapple with the fundamental problems at issue.

In *Captain Popanilla* Disraeli had tilted at the commercial middle class ; twenty years later he saw them endangering unity and breaking down, by their *laissez-faire* system, the bonds which had formerly bound all classes to one another. The Whig aristocracy was egoistic and without trust, the energetic middle class solely absorbed in the pursuit of wealth. The men of reason, cold-blooded sophists, deceiving

theorists, economists, utilitarians, had succeeded in separating class from class and destroying solidarity. Left to itself and uninspired by a lofty morality or sense of social justice, industry was becoming a juggernaut crushing beneath its unyielding mechanism all hopes of a good life and common culture. *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847) set out the political doctrine which should renew the inspiration of the Christian ages from the fountains of the East.

To his old gift for satire Disraeli added an emotional fervour that found characteristic expression in *Sybil* when he denounced the system that was dividing England into two nations animated by mutual hatred :

> "Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy ; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets ; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."
>
> "You speak of . . . " said Egremont, hesitatingly.
>
> "The Rich and the Poor."

Had Disraeli not given his life to statesmanship, his reputation as a novelist might well have fared better than it has. His work is still fresh and vigorous and the passing of time has shown that his insight into the domestic and social problems created by liberalism was little short of prophetic.

With so many writers ministering to their love of didacticism Victorian readers still turned sometimes in their hours of ease from scarifying pictures of social unrest to the far more scarifying mystery thrillers of Wilkie Collins, the first English novelist to deal with the detection of crime.

Thanks to the habit of bringing out novels as serials, in shilling numbers, this form of literature was reaching an enormous new body of readers which had hitherto been out of its reach. Like the audience of a country town suddenly visited by a troupe of actors, they were untrained in the conventions of the new art to which they were introduced. The public in the new industrial towns did not ask for sermons on the conditions around them ; they wanted melodrama—the more sensational the better—to help them escape from their

own drab lives. They wanted to be stimulated and excited, but they would have turned in scorn from the romance that thrilled Isabella Thorpe and her friends. Wilkie Collins, with an admirable grasp of the market, brought Gothicism up to date. His famous formula for a successful novel was, "Make 'em laugh; make 'em cry; make 'em wait." In *The Woman in White* (1860) he whirled his theatrical characters through a fantastic plot, broken by a series of climaxes preceded by breathtaking suspense, seeking and finding the depths of depravity below the apparently prosy surface of middle-class life.

The Woman in White opens in Hampstead, but having invented a crime too subtly ingenious for an Englishman, the author invents an Italian Count to commit it. Criminal psychology had advanced since the days of Mrs. Radcliffe and Maturin. Readers were more knowing, and Collins endows his villain with a Falstaffian physique, on the ground that it is hard to believe a fat man malevolent. He further disarms the suspicions of English readers by stressing the Count's devotion to pet animals. To make him even more acceptable his creator endows him with his own tastes. Thus Fosco is credited with a knowledge of the arts, a fondness for opera; he is a gourmand and a cosmopolitan critic of English ways. The resultant Virtuoso in the art of forgery and deception, with his cool audacity and clear insight into human nature may be a monster, but he is fascinating enough to pass in good society. Count Fosco has a long chain of descendants in modern fiction.

In *The Moonstone* (1868), a novel which had an undoubted influence on Dickens in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Collins exploited with advantage popular interest in the East. The story is far simpler in structure than *The Woman in White* and it has no characters to compare with Count Fosco in power and cunning, but the atmosphere is charged with a haunting sense of mystery aud fear. A man under the influence of drugs takes a jewel, stolen long before from the head of an Indian idol, and unknowingly conceals it. The situation is complicated by the mysterious appearance of three Brahmins, who have come to England in search of their treasure. Sergeant Cuff, the first detective in English fiction, figures in the story. Collins is a skilful narrator, and the recent revival of interest in his work may be a tribute to this power, one little exercised by contemporary writers.

Later in the century Collins was followed by another exponent of the detective thriller, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who will always be remembered for his creation of the amateur detective Sherlock Holmes and his foil Dr. Watson, whose adventures were embodied in a cycle of stories which first appeared in 1891.

The busy, strenuous years of ever-expanding British prosperity saw novels pour from the presses in a turbulent spate of mediocrity with here and there something good tossed up on the bank and rescued from oblivion. Among these were George Borrow's admirable wind-on-the-heath gypsy tale *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857), full of country lore, in which the reader could escape from industrialism in to a remote underworld as exotic in its own way as the Far East.

Growing interest in adolescence and education led Thomas Hughes in the mid-century to write *Tom Brown's School-days* (1857), the story of an ordinary schoolboy at Rugby in the great days when Dr. Arnold was creating the modern public school.

After the success enjoyed by Sir Walter Scott the historical novel never went out of favour and in the eighteen thirties Scott's mantle fell on the elegant shoulders of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, a writer of somewhat romantic tastes. His best-known historical novel is *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), a stirring colourful version of the volcanic eruption that destroyed Pompeii. Bulwer's versatility is shown in his creation of the "fashionable" novel – the butt of Disraeli and Thackeray – at the beginning of his career with *Pelham* (1828) and in the utopean fantasy *The Coming Race*, which was published in 1871. In this romance of the future the author describes his visit to a subterranean race that in distant ages took refuge from inundations in the bowels of the earth. Owing to the discovery of Vril, a form of energy embodying all the natural forces, this race has reached a high degree of civilization and scientific achievement. Their country is a Utopia in which there is neither crime nor war, neither poverty nor sensuality. Their women are physically stronger than their men, and it is the women who choose their spouses. This idealized study of a matriarch society is used to attack the principle of democracy based on numbers—a system that, according to Bulwer Lytton, leads to rivalry, misery, and degradation.

If by his "fashionable" novels Lytton influenced that feminine literary phenomenon "Ouida." *The Coming Race* was not without its effect too on Samuel Butler and H. G. Wells.

At this point in the history of the novel selection becomes increasingly difficult unless the strictest canons of excellence are employed. A high standard of technical competence is common enough as the novel develops and becomes the most popular literary form. But few English writers before the time of Henry James considered the novel as an art form or concerned themselves at all with its implications and possibilities. Although popular, the novel had not yet been assigned a lofty position in the literary hierarchy. Serious writers did not regard it in the same light as poetry or the drama. The novel was a form of entertainment, and well brought up children were taught not to read novels before luncheon. An educated Victorian reader idled away an evening with a novel when he did not feel equal to reading something more important—history, for example, or poetry.

But changes in its status begin to appear; they are the work of writers who brought to the novel a poetic intensity of feeling and passionate seriousness.

CHAPTER 8

Passions Spin the Plot

THE VICTORIAN NOVELISTS considered in this chapter belong to the second half of the century and illuminate it from loftier eminences than any of their contemporaries. True, none of them has the range and humour of Dickens, the ease and urbanity of Thackeray; neither have they a common interest in subject-matter or in treatment. What allies them is a passionate intensity that even the humblest, the less richly endowed Gissing, shares. Each of these novelists makes a special contribution to the understanding of life: Emily Brontë, transcendent vision; George Eliot, moral earnestness; Hardy, lyrical sensuality and uneasy pessimism; Gissing, wretchedness and anguish of heart. Common to them all is single-mindedness. They pay no court to popular favour; they write because they must, because a demon possesses them, and in doing so they give to the novel what has hitherto been confined to poetry and the drama—a certain spiritual sincerity, a "promethean gleam."

The contribution made by the Brontë sisters to English literature in the eighteen forties has a unique flavour—a strange pungent mingling of wild romance and domestic realism, of cosmic poetry and local detail. They are belated Romantics who derive from no school, and who appear to have no immediate successors. This originality, which gives them a just claim to be considered major English writers, is definitely traceable to certain circumstances of their lives. A study of these circumstances is, perhaps, an essential preliminary to any true understanding of the Brontës' work.

Patrick Brontë, an Irish clergyman of strong evangelical tendencies, settled with his wife and six young children in the parsonage of Haworth in Yorkshire in 1820. Whatever happiness the little family was to know in their new environment was short-lived. The mother died of cancer in 1821 and four years later the two elder daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, died too, leaving only the father and four children. Charlotte, ardent and ambitious, sharing her father's evangelical zeal and his reactionary political opinions; Branwell, the only brother, brilliant, but erratic and unstable and soon to be defeated by his own passionate irresponsibility; Emily,

inscrutable and remote, brooding over her inner visions ; and Anne, the fairest of the sisters, a pale shadow among these strong, vibrant personalities.

For the greater part of their lives they lived in the cloistral seclusion of the dank, unhealthy parsonage, with its windows looking out on to the graveyard beyond. From time to time they would escape, but the magic spell cast over them by their common life together drew them back. The scenery around was grim and forbidding, for the hills of the West Riding, amongst which Haworth stands, are formed of sombre millstone grit. Rough grass, heather and ling is all the bleak hills can bear, with perhaps a scanty crop of oats. The Brontës passed their childhood and maturity amid the long low moors, dark with heather, crossed by innumerable peat-coloured streams that flashed menacingly over their rocky beds, and overhung by clouds often heavy with the presage of storm.

At first sight there seemed little to entertain children in the sober puritan village and little to encourage them in their strong but eccentric father, yet the seclusion in which they lived, fatal to the social graces, proved a forcing-house for the imagination. And today, thanks to the untiring efforts of editors, it is possible to tell the strangest story of the strangest childhood in English literature and to reveal the true significance of the lines written by Charlotte in 1835 :

> We wove a web in childhood,
> A web of sunny air.

The examination of dozens of tiny booklets often less than two inches square, bound in blue-grey and multi-coloured covers torn from sugar bags, ignored by earlier biographers and at one time dipersed through chance sale, has yielded strange secrets. One hundred of these booklets, equal in wordage to the total published works of the three Brontë sisters, have been traced and studied ; the whole mass has proved to be a continuous saga of the imaginary world. For nearly twenty years the Brontës shared their day-dreams and wove them into story cycles, sagas, wish-fulfilment fantasies, expressions of unconscious desires and fears, experiences and adventures in which the child's will always prevails and the laws of the physical universe are set aside.

A recent student[1] of these booklets has written thus of them :

> They are a closely connected series of stories, poems, novels, histories and dramas having a common setting and common characters, written and illustrated through sixteen years between 1829 and 1845, a period comprehending approximately one-third of Charlotte's life and one-half of Branwell's, each making its definite contribution to a highly complex existence. They are the epic cycles of an imaginary world in which the four young Brontës lived and moved and had their being, into which they projected themselves and all they knew of life from narrow experience and wide reading. They are the frank, unembarrassed, unselfconscious diary of a Charlotte the world has never known, who built for herself a refuge in the "silent, unseen land of thought" where her romantic spirit found escape from the discipline and restraints of ordinary life, a refuge shared by no one but her brother and sisters. Even more, they are the laboratory in which developed all the elements that in their several combinations make up the *Professor, Jane Eyre, Shirley* and *Villette* . . . They conclusively deny that Charlotte's Belgian experience had any part in awakening her genius, for they show that her genius had no sudden awakening, but developed gradually and normally in response to her formative experiences, and was full-grown and selfconscious in all its fire and passion before she set foot on the Continent.
>
> In contrast to the familiar picture of the four little Brontës, frail, neglected and prematurely old, crouching in terror before the ever-threatening monsters of disease and early deaths, the *Juvenilia* show us singularly happy beings possessed of an Aladdin's lamp through whose power they transcended time and distance, walked with kings and swayed a mighty empire . . . These little books hold in their tiny script the most remarkable romance in literature and the most accurate record of the evolution of genius in any language.

For the Brontës as human beings as opposed to the Brontës as writers the long preoccupation with dream-worlds was perhaps less fortunate.

They themselves were not entirely unaware of the psychological dangers their world of day-dreams held for them. Charlotte complained that ordinary society was "wretchedly insipid" compared with the visions of her fiery imagination. Within the dream-world they were as gods, self-endowed

1. Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford in *Brontes Web of Childhood.*

with power to grant every wish and to still the secret longings of the soul ; outside was the harsh reality—dull people, social disappointments, the intractable situations of everyday life. Day-dreaming was a potent drug that insidiously sapped their energies even while it satisfied their cravings for a more intense and exciting existence than any that they could command in the world without. And in the end they were exhausted by the strong effort of imagination needed to sustain the collective dream-world in which they had chosen to live for so many years, long after the normal span of childhood was over. The Brontës drained themselves of life to nourish their imaginary universe. They lived for an illusion and, perhaps, they died of it.

What is so fascinating in this dream-world is the contrast in ethics they offer with the actual standards of the writers in real life. Charlotte's Angria, conquered by two Angrian characters the Dukes of Zamorna and Northangerland, is a place of marble columns and rich draperies, of majestic mountains and stately rivers, of women dying for love and men always scornful, handsome and magniloquent. It is an escape world where actions which excited Charlotte's severest censure in real life were not merely condoned but enjoyed. Her dark, ruthless, fascinating Byronic hero-villains were both irresistible to women and their illicit amours are the themes of many a poem and tale.

In this world of exotic magnificence so unlike the grey, proper reality in which she lived, Charlotte licensed her imagination to rove unreproved in all the ways of vice. How much it meant to her is clearly shown by the many references in her journal. Charlotte, "writhing under the irritations and tedium of teaching, wooed the Angrian dream" :

> And now once more on a dull Saturday afternoon I sit down to try to summon around me the dim shadows, not of coming events, but of incidents long departed, of feelings of pleasures whose exquisite relish I sometimes fear it will never be my lot again to taste . . . My dream shifted to some distant city, some huge imperial metropolis where the descendants of the last nobleman, the young lords and ladies, shine in gay circles of patricians and, dazzled by the brilliancy of courts . . . sons and daughters have almost forgotten the groves where they were born and grew. As I saw them stately and handsome, gliding through these saloons where many other well-known forms

> crossed my sight, where there were faces looking up, eyes smiling, and lips moving in audible speech that I knew better almost than my brother and sisters, yet whose voices had never woke an echo in this world, whose eyes had never grazed upon that daylight, what glorious associations crowded upon me, what excitement heated my face and made me clasp my hands in ecstasy. . . . Far from home I cannot write of them ; except in total solitude, I scarce dare think of them.

As an antidote against the blissful but soul-destroying poison of her imagination, Charlotte sought the comforts of religion and friendship, but conscience waged a losing battle and the spell was only intermittently resisted.

There is no doubt that the day-dream script habit was an essential part of the Brontë mentality and exerted a strongly formative influence on their work. The small physical space into which their writing was crammed, and the tiny delicate print almost indecipherable without a magnifying glass, affected their composition. Erasures and corrections would have been very uncomfortable in such cramped quarters. Their "noble English," as Thackeray called it, depended upon an admirably exact and plain style free from ornament and redundancy, in fact just the kind of style their early method of composition would have encouraged.

Charlotte was the first to try to break away from the enclosed family circle. In 1835 she went to Roe Head School, where she had formerly been a pupil, as a governess. Emily followed her three months later, but soon it became obvious that she could not stay. "When she awoke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Soon her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened rapid decline. ... Nobody knew what ailed her but me—I knew only too well." Convinced that Emily would die if she did not go home, Charlotte arranged for her to return to the parsonage and for Anne to take her place. The web of childhood had claimed its first victim.

Charlotte's greater strength of will and her ambition to be free and independent enabled her to endure. Her spirit all fire and air, was more enterprising and her troubled conscience recognized the insidious siren song of the imagination and she resolved to lead a more practical life. Moreover, she wanted

to save herself and her sisters from the soul-destroying lives of governesses by starting a school, and to this end she went as a pupil, together with Emily, to the Pensionnat Héger in Brussels, later returning as a governess. Again Emily followed in her wake, but in the end the lure of the fantasy world was too strong and they went back to Haworth and their dream. Not, however, before certain experiences had given their fantasies a local habitation and a name.

Charlotte's nature was vehement and emotional, but the forces of personal passion remained dormant until she formed the strange attachment for M. Héger, principal of the school to which fate seemed to have directed her in Brussels. In M. Héger she encountered for the first time in her life an intellect stronger than her own ; masculine power of judgment and strength of will. At last she could compare the imaginative experience with reality. The breath of outward circumstances may have dimmed the bright Byronic splendour of Zamorna, but it gave that vision concreteness. Few would have bothered to read the outpourings of adolescent eroticism, but now the fierce imaginary passions were put to the service of a real love. An unhappy love, too, that was frustrated from the start by her moral integrity and his very successful marriage. Out of this passion, checked by invisible though impassable barriers, sprang the impulse that enabled her to give something entirely new to literature. The novel became the vehicle for passion, lifelike in its intensity, for Charlotte Brontë was the first novelist to take as her subject-matter a woman's daydream of romantic love and turn it into literature.

There is little background in her books. Minor characters are sketchily drawn and the light is focused boldly and dramatically on two persons, the hero and the heroine, with Charlotte always her own heroine. Lovingly and with unusual honesty she explored her own nature, which in its tenderness, its strength, its turbulent desires, its queer mixture of recklessness and probity, was the chief source of her inspiration. How were her contemporaries to know, when she published *Jane Eyre*, of the long apprenticeship her passions had already served in the workshop of romantic dreams, or guess that Edward Fairfax Rochester was none other than the magnetic hero of Charlotte's girlhood, the Duke of Zamorna and Emperor of Angria? Her contemporaries, unable to see how novels of such fire and passion could come from the pen of

an inexperienced girl, premised a great emotional upheaval in her own life and not unnaturally thought it happened abroad.

The earliest literary efforts of the Brontë sisters—the poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell—for so they called themselves—were published in 1846, but met with little success. Then the sisters turned the "stuff" of childhood into novels, and in one year, 1847-48, appeared *Jane Eyre*, Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*.

With *Jane Eyre* glamour comes to the novel and the two chief characters are drawn with an unforgettable poetic intensity. Diligent research into the notebooks has shown that situations, even scraps of dialogue, come from the days of the Angrian wooden soldiers and, appearing in clearly recognizable form in the tiny booklets, antedate Charlotte's departure for Roe Head in January 1831, three months before she was fifteen. But her own experiences in Brussels gave maturity and conviction to the portrayal of passion. *Jane Eyre* links a highly exciting and romantic story to a sober and honest realism. The little governess was something new. She was the creation not of a man who might have known her from the outside, but of a woman who had herself experienced the slights and humiliations that life inflicts on Jane. The fiery soul, the pride, the courage, integrity and resolute purpose were all part of Charlotte herself. She too was "so frail and so indomitable"—"a free human being with an independent will." Jane is willing to take the full responsibility for her life, and with her, modern woman enters fiction for the first time and struggles with the fundamental problems posed by love and sex.

Shirley, Charlotte Brontë's next novel, which followed in 1849, is a sober piece of work. Charlotte warned her readers not to expect the glamour and excitement of *Jane Eyre*: "Calm your expectation. . . . Something real, cool and solid lies before you ; something unromantic as Monday morning." The scene of the story is Yorkshire and the period the latter part of the Napoleonic wars, the time of the Luddite riots, when the wool industry of the country was suffering from the almost complete cessation of exports. In the character of Shirley Keeldar Charlotte Brontë depicted the character of her sister Emily, as she saw it.

In *Villette* (1853) she ostensibly told the story of her love

for M. Héger, whose identity is masked in the character of Paul Emmanuel. The very success of *Villette* brought unhappiness to Charlotte Brontë. The story seemed to confirm local gossip and surmisings and led to a complete misunderstanding of her art. *Villette* was read as a personal confession : "the most flaming autobiography in the language."

Possibly May Sinclair is correct in declaring that "no supreme work of art was ever taken. It was begotten, born and grown, the offspring of a faithful love between the soul of the artist and reality." This contention of a sympathetic critic has been amply confirmed from the *Juvenilia*—written twenty years before Charlotte had conceived Paul Emmanuel. Constantin Héger could have contributed, at most, no more than the outward semblance for a personality alive and active in Charlotte's imagination for many years before she met Héger and wrote *Villette*. But despite the distant origin of such characters as John Graham Bretton, Paulina Mary Holme, together with the pivotal plot and countless incidents in the story, the fact remains that *Villette* belongs to the real world. Lucy Snow, Mrs. Beck, Dr. John and M. Paul are more than "sunny air". The web of Charlotte's mature fiction is spun of more substantial stuff than the filmy, gossamer "web of childhood."

As a work of art *Villette* is not altogether satisfactory. It bristles with glaring improbabilities, is unequal in conception and shows signs of inevitable emotional overstrain. Memories of Mrs. Radcliffe and the Terror school are evoked at every turn and yet flashes of imaginative brilliance are revealed.

Charlotte's imagination was of the romantic kind that brooked no restraint. She did not attempt to discipline its fiery force. Not that she permitted it to riot in the telling of the story; for the most part there are few impossibilities in her narratives and the passions that inspire them gain strength from the firm control exercised by the author. It is rather in certain symbolic incidents that the unrestrained violence, the immaturity of her imagination, shows itself, as in the picture that Jane Eyre paints, in the visionary flights of Shirley and in Caroline's strange dream. At such moments when the day-dream world asserts its hold over her all the paraphernalia of Gothic romanticism is called into play. Then she obtains her effects by the crude melodrama of swords dripping blood, spectral forms, demons, angelic countenances while the style

of writing deteriorates. Her pages teem with apostrophes and personifications and simplicity gives way to an adolescent rhetoric.

All this, ridiculous as it is, belongs to the stuff of childhood, to the memories of Mrs. Radcliffe and the Gothic horror. But from time to time flashes of imaginative brilliance light up the book. Such incidents as Lucy Snow's wanderings through the city given over to carnival and revelry while she is sick and under the influence of a drug, or the last terrible storm that swallows up Paul Emmanuel, are unforgettable. They are part of the glamour, as, indeed, are the horrifying moorlands in *Jane Eyre*, the candle-lit interiors, and the frenzied, drink-sodden maniac setting fire to the house. Imagination in such moments throws its glittering veil over life.

Charlotte soon wrote herself out. She had difficulty in finishing *Villette*, for the material was not new, the basic situation had already been used in *The Professor*, a novel actually written before *Jane Eyre* although not published until 1857, two years after Charlotte's death. Four times already the master-pupil relationship had been used; within that pattern inspiration had withered. She was obsessed with one situation—her own terrible frustrated passion. Her imagination moved in a groove and only by surrendering herself to the emotional extravagances of sensation could she write at all.

An almost aggressive awareness of this is revealed in her letter : "Imagination is a strong restless faculty which claims to be heard and expressed ; are we to be deaf to her cry and insensate to her struggles ?" Her romantic nature conceived the creative impulse as a demonic force that sways and dominates its possessor.

> When authors write best [she urges in a letter to her publisher], or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them which becomes their master, which will have its way - putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words and insisting on their being used whether vehement or measured in their nature, moulding characters, giving unthought-of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

With this confession in view it is not surprising that Charlotte Brontë condemned Jane Austen for not having "a

speaking acquaintanceship with the stormy sisterhood of vehemence and passion." Incapable of detachment herself, she was apt to mistake that quality in others for insincerity and indifference. A fire of passionate feeling burned in her and her novels are warm with the blaze.

Significant though Charlotte's new note in fiction was, it is silenced by the one tremendous chord that crashed from Emily's lyre. Hers was the strongest and in every way the strangest of these personalities that wove their dreams in the musty air of the old parsonage. Nothing can ever be known of her life outside what has come down to us, for Charlotte burned all Emily's papers and letters after her death. Yet enough can be deduced from her poems, from her one novel, from the few characteristic anecdotes told of her and the testimony of M. Héger, her teacher, to reveal the essential nature of a woman who holds a unique position in the history of the English novel. Alone among the Victorian novelists she challenges comparison with Dostoievski. To her belongs the credit of writing the one metaphysical novel.

Beside the ardour, restlessness and ambitious activity of Charlotte, Emily seems strangely reserved. She was a recluse, shrinking away from any contact with the outer world, even to the point of retiring to her room when tradespeople called. In the preface to *Wuthering Heights* Charlotte writes :

> She had scarcely more knowledge of the peasantry among whom she lived than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gate. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious ; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; though her feelings for the people around were benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought; nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them; knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest and talk of them with detail; minute, graphic, accurate ; but *with* them she rarely exchanged a word.

For her material of everyday life she was dependent on her sister.

> Emily would never go into any sort of society herself and whenever I went I could, on my return, communicate

> to her a pleasure that suited her by giving the distinct faithful impression of each scene I had witnessed. When pressed to go she would sometimes say, 'What is the use ? Charlotte will bring it all home to me."

Stories told of her reveal an indomitable will, iron reserve, immovable self-control and, withal, a certain ruthlessness, even a touch of sadism. Yet she had great tenderness, but it was centred wholly on the home and its inmates. All the warmth of an intensely affectionate nature was canalized narrowly but deeply and found an outlet only in her devotion to Charlotte, Branwell and, above all, to Anne.

Emily's strength was of the mind and the spirit, her temperament was highly nervous, and the wilfulness that no law could curb must have overtaxed her delicate physical organism. A notable tribute was paid to her by M. Héger, who had no personal reason to like her—he aroused no enthusiasm in her and she criticized his teaching methods. But his judgment remained dispassionate. Mrs. Gaskell in her life of Charlotte throws much light on M. Héger's opinion of Emily. She agreed with his estimation of Emily's genius as something even higher than Charlotte's. According to M. Héger, Emily had a head for logic, and a capability of argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman. But impairing the force of this gift was a stubborn tenacity of will, which rendered her obtuse to all reasoning where her own wishes or her own sense of right was concerned. "She should have been a man—a great navigator," said M. Héger in speaking of her. "Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old ; and her strong, imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty ; never have given way but with life." Mrs. Gaskell adds : "And yet, moreover, her faculty of imagination was such that, if she had written a history, her view of scenes and characters would have been so vivid, and so powerfully expressed, and supported by such a show of argument, that it would have dominated over the reader, whatever might have been his previous opinions, or his cooler perceptions of its truth."

This is an unsual tribute for a man to pay to a woman and it suggests the true source of her genius, which lay in a unique combination of two natures—the male and the female.

She had a man's intellectual strength, boldness and utter refusal to conform and a woman's tenderness and sensitivity. Whether or not she ever loved is not known or likely to be. But had she done so, passion could never have been in her case a simple thing. She would have felt a mental hunger for love rather than a physical need. Her religion, too, was mystical. Rejecting the creed of eternal damnation so dear to the age, she saw salvation in the gospel of love and forgiveness. Evil was not a positive force in her scheme of things; its apparently tragic destructiveness sprang from energy misdirected.

Considered from this point of view, her one novel, *Wuthering Heights*, has something in common with a morality play. Love, cast out by pride and jealousy, turns to hate and seeks revenge, perverting all the forces of life and creating despair and misery, until love, reborn of pity, redeems past wrong through hope and joy. Emily neither praises nor blames the unhappy creatures who are caught up in the titanic struggle between flesh and spirit her imagination had created. The more conventional moral teaching that satisfied the mature Charlotte had no charms for her. Even in the "Gondal" days her heroine was a queen of great, but unlawful, passion whose actions produced the consequences which they would produce in real life. Evil created evil, and good good, and the lot of the inhabitants of the dream-world was a realistic mingling of both. Throughout her life Emily remained content to show the workings of fate with scrupulous impartiality; she never developed a Non-conformist conscience to offset an adolescent tenderness towards illicit romance, as Charlotte did.

Symbolism too plays its part in *Wuthering Heights* in the sharp contrasting of two worlds. Wuthering Heights, home of the Earnshaws, is the dark, storm-tossed centre of violent passions where elemental forces hold complete sway. Thrushcross Grange, home of the Lintons, set in the lush smiling valley, is a fit environment for the gentle, gracious people who possess it. Respectively the two worlds stand for passion and reason, discord and harmony, dynamic energy and stasis. Nietzsche might have called them Dionysian and Apollonian. Mutually destructive as they are, yet they seem impelled to seek reconciliation. In the novel the conflict between them is resolved but only through tragedy.

The plot of external action, probably suggested by Scott's

The Black Dwarf, unfolds the story in three movements and is marked by a peculiar symmetry.

Earnshaw brings back from Liverpool not the expected presents for his children, Hindley and Catherine, but a ragged gypsy boy, a dark alien spirit, whom he forces his wife to recognize. As the boy grows up he becomes Catherine's inseparable companion, and so long as they are children their lives are closely linked. Catherine reveals how strong the bond is in her dramatic outburst to Nelly Dean when she tries to explain her reasons for marrying another :

> I cannot express it ; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here ? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning ; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remainad, I should still continue to be ; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger : I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods ; time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath : a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, *I am* Heathcliff ! He's always, always in my mind : not as pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again : it is impracticable ; and . . .

But the transcendental harmony implied in this utterance is destroyed partly by the jealousy of Hindley, who resents the dark intruder, and partly by Catherine herself.

After old Earnshaw's death Hindley takes his revenge on Heathcliff by denying him education and by degrading and brutalizing him, so that Catherine, in spite of her great love, is prevented by pride from marrying her boorish lover.

> It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now ; so he shall never know how I love him : and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more mine than I am.

Instead she rejects him for the elegance, harmony and refinement of the Linton world. Her choice, dictated by pride, is responsible for destroying all that is good in Heathcliff.

Heathcliff disappears; Catherine marries Edgar Linton; Hindley remains in possession of Wuthering Heights. The first rapid cycle of disintegration is followed by an uneasy stasis.

Some years later Heathcliff comes back, rich, outwardly more polished and sure of himself, but the force of love in him has turned to a fierce hatred that threatens to destroy all with whom he comes in contact. Under the power of the love-hatred Catherine and Heathcliff torture each other. Their thwarted love turns into a passion that is neither of the flesh nor of the spirit, but which draws its destructive energy from frustration. Catherine's death in childbirth after a stormy scene with Heathcliff is the signal for his maniacal hatred to burst forth. His revenge sets the second cycle of action in motion.

Heathcliff's object is to gain complete control over the destinies of all those who, in some way, are linked to the tragedy of his life. His first victim is his old enemy Hindley Earnshaw. By flattering him and debauching him he leads Hindley to gamble away his inheritance, and the wretch dies in despair, leaving behind his infant son, Hareton. Heathcliff abuses the child's affection and degrades and brutalizes him. Linton Heathcliff, the sickly fruit of his own hated union with Isabella Linton, is used as a pawn in the greater game of getting Catherine's daughter into his power and, with her, Thrushcross Grange. All this he achieves and before long both worlds are Heathcliff's to command. But his triumph brings him no peace; it only increases the inner loneliness that cuts him off from all human contact.

The final stage of the story shows love and pity, blossoming amid cruelty, hate and despair, finally overcoming the forces of evil. Spiritually and physically Heathcliff has overreached himself. By forcing the young Catherine to live at Wuthering Heights he frustrates his own revenge.

Nothing could better illustrate Emily Brontë's purpose in choosing this strange theme than the reconciliation brought about by the young Catherine. The girl has not the vaguest idea that she has a mission to fulfil. From her mother she has inherited courage and constancy, a capacity for ardent attachments, along with pride, imperiousness and her mother's defective judgment. Hareton falls in love with her and she

threatens to play the same part in his life as her mother had played in Heathcliff's—the drama of pride, love and hate seems about to be repeated. Repelled by Hareton's ignorance, his coarse manners, scornfully amused by his devotion to her, she despises and mocks him. But her nature is not all Earnshaw; the gentler Linton blood has softened her and given her the power to feel remorse. One day when she has tormented him cruelly she is touched by his pain; confesses her fault, sheds tears of contrition and finally bestows the kiss of peace. More practically she promises to teach him to read. From now on they are outside the circle of hate. Catherine has no idea of the extent of her achievement, she only senses that Heathcliff's power is ended. He is helpless against her because he cannot deprive Hareton of the one supreme good—her love—the one positive force that triumphs over evil. Love exorcises the demons that have so long possessed Wuthering Heights.

None of the characters is conscious of what has happened. There is no repentance, no miraculous awakening to wrong done and undone. Heathcliff simply finds himself changed; he loses his desire for revenge and after one last savage outburst he relaxes his grip on the lives of those about him—for ever. Revenge has never calmed the fever in his blood because he could never be content with a purely negative victory—he is too sincere for that. Monstrous though his conduct is, Heathcliff arouses our compassion by the very intensity of his suffering. At last, death, self-sought and welcomed, unites him with the first Catherine. Hareton and his bride leave Wuthering Heights to its ghosts and seek a new way of life at Thrushcross Grange—the house in the valley. Within that pattern experience is complete.

An interesting point is raised by the sequel to Heathcliff's end. Whatever the vulgar may believe about the spirits that continue to haunt the old house, Emily Brontë implies in her last sentence an ultimate serenity for them all:

> I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones, on the slope of the next moor; the middle one grey, and half buried in heath: Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf and moss creeping up its foot: Heathcliff's still bare.
>
> I lingered around them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened

to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

Wuthering Heights justifies its claim to more detailed consideration by its uniqueness. As a love story it belongs to the tradition of *Tristan and Isolde, Deirdre and Naisi, Romeo and Juliet.* Such romantic passion must necessarily end in death, since life is too frail to endure such ecstasy. But Emily Brontë did more than depict a strong and tragic passion ; she loaded the outer story with metaphysical implications. And for this reason the theme, in spite of a certain grotesqueness and overstrain in its presentation compels respect, for through it a poet-novelist communicated the special vision of life that constitutes her glory.

If the novel has significance at all it expresses the Blakean belief that energy is eternal delight and that what is called good and evil spring from the same source. Lawlessness, discord and violence are the price that has to be paid for failure to achieve self-knowledge and to live harmoniously. Passion and reason follow disastrously diverse laws. Heathcliff is not evil. He represents a source of dynamic energy which has been denied a creative outlet through love. In certain rare and precious moments, recorded in her poems, Emily Brontë makes it clear that she discerned a reality that gave the lie to human judgments on good and evil. At best, good and evil correspond to intellectual concerts ; at worst, they are rationalized prejudices—truth lies beyond them. Long before Freud explored the "inner landscape" Emily Brontë understood the nature of those conflicting impulses within the human soul and realized that the most terrible impulses can often be suppressed only at the cost of endangering the structure of personality. *Wuthering Heights* is, perhaps, less a novel than a psychological drama in which the characters are the personified powers that stormed and despaired in Emily Brontë's own being. Such insight into human experience as she had is rare. It is beyond analysis—it is the gift of genius.

To turn from Emily Brontë to George Eliot is to leave the wild stormy uplands, reverberant with thunder and full of menace under the flash of lightning, for the lecture room, gaslit, a little stuffy, and with a marked preponderance of

bald heads. The atmosphere is unmistakably that of horsehair, black satin and learned conversation. Yet George Eliot, too, is animated by passion; in her case an intellectual and moral passion that had its origin not in any truth seized by the imagination, but determined by human reason unaided by faith.

Mary Ann Evans, otherwise George Eliot, was born in Warwickshire in 1819 and spent the early years of her life with her father, an estate agent, and her brother, Isaac. From childhood she showed an abnormal aptitude for study, quickly outstripping her brother in the range of her academic achievements and in the facility with which she acquired knowledge. Many years later she painted the picture of the two children with considerable humour and insight in *The Mill on the Floss*.

At the age of twenty-two George Eliot went with her father to Coventry, and there, under the influence of Charles Bray, a Coventry manufacturer, she began to free herself from the narrow religious outlook which bound her family. She met Charles Hennell, whose *Enquiry* led her to question the validity of revealed religion. Unhappily for herself, she fell in love with Hennell and suffered her first humiliating disappointment when he married the daughter of Dr. Brabant—the model for Dr. Casaubon. George Eliot meanwhile showed an unfeminine stoicism in consoling herself by finishing her successful rival's translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846). Friendships with freethinkers and wide reading in science and philosophy at this time completely undermined her religious beliefs and she rejected religion altogether. The break was made with reluctance as she knew it would cause her father much pain.

In 1850 George Eliot, a rationalist and bluestocking, was honoured by being offered the assistant editorship of the *Westminster Review*. Founded by the Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, it was the organ of the philosophical radicals. She came to London, and, once settled in the capital, new and wider horizones opened out before her. Congenial and important friendships were formed with Froude, Francis Newman, Greg and the Martineaus, and above all, with Herbert Spencer. To Carlyle the latter may have seemed the most "immeasurable ass in Christendom," but to many he represented all that was most impressive in English philosophical thought. Founder of

the evolutionary philosophy. Spencer believed that all knowledge could be unified on the basis of a single all-pervading principle, that of evolution. In his *Education, Intellectual, Moral and Physical* he showed a frank contempt for the humanities and urged that science should be made the principal instrument of education. The splendour of Spencer's intellect fascinated George Eliot and she fell deeply in love with him, but the philosopher fled—not, however, before he had introduced her to George Henry Lewes.

Lewes, a freethinker and a versatile professional writer on philosophy and natural science, is remembered, if he can be said to be remembered at all, as the author of the phrase "emergent evolution." In his own time he commanded much respect among advanced thinkers. Like many of George Eliot's own literary heroes, Lewes was physically unattractive and, moreover, he had ruined his health by incessant literary work and the poverty to which he condemned himself in order to provide generously for his wife, from whom he was separated. Outwardly he had little to offer a woman like George Eliot, but his devotion won her love. They could not marry, but convinced in her own mind that her love for Lewes was honourable and right, she proudly defied Victorian convention and lived with him. She dedicated her books to him, took his name and was, in every way except in the eyes of society, his wife.

Her action cost her the esteem and friendship of her own family, who renounced her and refused, even when she became famous, to have anything to do with her. For a time, too, close friends turned cold. She resigned her post on the *Westminster Review*, and soon learnt that only unsigned articles from her pen would be accepted. Yet in spite of these humiliations she did not flinch from a course of action which her conscience, the only arbiter she admitted, approved.

Poverty and misfortune dogged them for a while and at one time they were too poor to afford more than one room. George Eliot had to endure the scratching of Lewes's pen on the paper as he wrote until her nerves were at breaking-point. But his value to her was to prove incalculable. Recognising that her mind was superior to his own, Lewes, whose nature seems to have been free from jealousy, set to work to create confidence in her. He sustained her with praise and gave her devoted service. He played the midwife to her genius. In

1857, inspired and encouraged by Lewes, she wrote *Amos Barton*, which was published by Blackwoods, followed by *Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story* and *Janet's Repentance* in the same year: these stories at once excited admiration of her talent as a novelist. The three tales appeared together as *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858) and were published under the name she was to make famous—George Eliot.

The material for her first important novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), was drawn from memories of her childhood, from the personalities and experiences that belonged to the world of the English provincial towns fired by religious revivalism and the Methodist preachers. The plot is founded on a story told to George Eliot by her aunt, Elizabeth Evans, a Methodist preacher and the original of the Dinah Morris of the novel, of a confession of child-murder, made to her by a girl in prison. The story follows the moral pattern that characterizes all George Eliot's novels. Hetty Sorrel, whose prettiness and the vanity that accompanies it cause her tragedy, is used to reveal a puritan disenchantment with beauty as a snare and a delusion. She is contrasted with Dinah Morris, who represents the stern moral integrity that renounces self and devotes all the energy of youth and enthusiasm to a cause. Such conduct alone, we are made to feel, is praiseworthy.

George Eliot, knowing that the wages of sin is untold misery, did not shrink from showing it requiting the transgressor. Such moral determination gave to her novels a certain rigidity, but it also gave them power and significance. Sorrow was strictly determined, but by character, not by external factors. Her characters are caught in some unbreakable chain of causation: "our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds" is an assertion fully justified by her novels.

There had been nothing quite like George Eliot before. Her appearance excited attention. Henry James found her sweet and superior, and liked the expression of her large, lined, pale, equine face. Sir Edmund Gosse referred to her as a "large, thick-set sibyl, dreamy and immobile, whose massive features were somewhat grim when seen in profile." Frederick Myers described a walk he had with her in the Fellows' Garden at Trinity on an Evening in May:

> she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her texts the three words which had been used so often as

> the inspiring trumpet-call of men—the words God, Immortality, Duty—pronounced with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute was the third. . . . I listened and night fell; her grave, majestic countenance turned towards me like a sibyl's in the gloom.

Praise of her swept high; she was even compared with Dante to her advantage, but it must be remembered that age was prejudiced against Catholics.

George Eliot was an austere rationalist who had discarded religion along with mystery, beauty and hope, but who retained an inexorable ethical creed that demanded nothing for right action beyond the sober satisfaction of having done what was right. Virtue, indeed, was its own reward; to ask more was venal.

Excessive devotion to study probably impaired an imagination that most likely had never been over-active. This was a defect in a novelist and to some extent may be held responsible for the subsequent decline of her popularity once the moralizing Victorian age was over. Consciously antiromantic, she rejected glamour, personality, physical loveliness, and insisted that true beauty is of the soul and can be seen only in action. It is doubtful if a woman novelist had ever had such an austere taste in males. Her true heroes are often humble, ordinary people:

> simply men of complexion more or less muddy, whose conversation is more or less bald and disjointed. Yet these commonplace people many of them bear a conscience and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys, nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance —in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?

The cult of the commonplace is a feature of her novels and her works are bathed in a dry cold light.

What interested her above all were the human motives it was her privilege to explore and comprehend. She is the first English novelist to analyse the secret thoughts of her characters, to probe their unavowed desires and look within and reveal the operations of the human will. Her analysis of Arthur Donnithorne's reaction to his seduction of Hetty

Sorrel is the beginning of a new technique, based on introspection. This interest in motive can be partly accounted for by her relative maturity. She was nearly forty when she wrote her first novel, was widely read in philosophy and science, and her serious mind and character were set and hardened by experience. Her decision to live with Lewes had caused her to be looked on for a time as a pariah; she knew at first hand the secret agonies, the shame and the humiliation that was the lot of those whom society rejected because they had infringed its code. And she knew, too, that often in these matters society was false and hypocritical. This personal experience underlies her novels. It convinced her that Lewes was right in insisting on the importance of suffering in life and especially in the lives of women. For them personal suffering was the great source of inspiration and they found relief for their pangs by transferring them to the plane of fiction.

All George Eliot's heroines—Maggie Tulliver, Esther Lyon, Dorothea Brooke, Gwendolen Harleth and Romola—go through the difficulties and the agonies and the struggles that had fallen to her own lot. As idealists they pit their values against life, are disillusioned, and after the period of disillusionment is over win through to resignation and serenity. Her novels reveal an exceptional sense of the pathos of human life, and a deep conviction that human nature can be tried and purified only in the fires of suffering.

The contrast between the world's values and the inner reality forms the subject of her next novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) which, incidentaly, portrays her brother Isaac and herself in the characters of Tom and Maggie Tulliver. Tom is a prosaic youth, narrow of imagination and intellect, animated by conscious rectitude of purpose and a disposition to exercise control over others. Maggie is a far nobler type, highly strung and intelligent, of intense sensibility and possessing artistic and poetic tastes. Maggie loves both her brother and her ignorant and obstinate father, the miller of Dovecote Mill, but the conflict of temperaments and the incongruity between Maggie's character and her unsympathetic environment create much unhappiness for the girl and eventually lead to tragedy. Tom's conventional attitude to life thwarts her love with the result that the emotional and intellectual sides of her nature are alike starved. Dissension comes

to a head between brother and sister when Maggie falls in love with Philip Wakem, son of the lawyer responsible for her father's bankruptcy. Yielding to her brother's authority, she breaks off her friendship with Philip and in doing so she gives in to external circumstances and is untrue to herself. Happiness does not follow. As a result of her association with Stephen Guest, Maggie is innocently compromised, but the misunderstanding further alienates the brother who has wrecked her happiness, but whom she still loves. Reconciliation comes, but too late. Maggie risks her life in an attempt to save her brother, who is trapped in the mill when the river overflows its banks, and both are swept away in the flood. A woman's fineness, her idealism and nobility, wasted by the stupid coarseness of the everyday world, was a theme to which George Eliot was to turn again and again.

In her next novel, *Silas Marner* (1863), she had the congenial task of describing a character passing from a lower to a higher moral level and achieving happiness through love and sacrifice. Silas Marner, the poor Methodist linen-weaver, driven out of his religious community to which he belongs by a false charge of theft, takes refuge in the agricultural village of Raveloe. From being careless of this world's goods Silas grows into a miser, dominated by desire to increase his store of gold. When this is stolen from him he becomes frantic with despair and would most likely have killed himself but for a strange accident. Returning home from his fruitless search for the lost treasure, he finds a golden-haired baby before the fire in his cottage. He adopts the little orphan—for such she appears to be—and under her influence all that was good in his nature comes once more to the surface and he changes a second time to a generous, affectionate old man with no thought but for the good of others. The change is not miraculous. The old linen-weaver belongs to the type that needs an outer stimulus. At first he devoted himself to the Methodist community, then to his gold, and finally to the child. The worthier the object the greater Silas Marner becomes, for in George Eliot's scheme of things—conduct is all.

So far the life presented in her novels had been concerned with the provincial England she knew so well as a child, but in *Romola* (1864) she turned to the Italian Renaissance. The background of the novel is Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, the troubled period following the expulsion of the

Medici, of the expedition of Charles VIII, of distracted counsels in the city, of the excitement caused by the preaching of the fanatic monk Savonarola, and the acute division between the popular party and the Medici.

With characteristic energy and thoroughness George Eliot spent six months in Florence, notebook in hand, she read countless histories and memoirs and then made her selection. Ignoring the highlights of that dramatic period, she took an obscure incident in the revolt against the monk and concentrated all her power on throwing it into relief. It is not difficult to see what appealed to her in the central situation. Romola, the daughter of an old blind scholar, is another of the noble-natured heroines born for disillusionment when they are lured by worldly values. She is bewitched and ultimately betrayed by the handsome Greek stranger Tito, whose self-indulgence leads him to utter perfidy. He plays upon Romola's idealism and her love for her father. She is blinded to the realities of Tito's nature and her judgment is led astray by his charm, eloquence and wit. When finally Tito is murdered by a benefactor he has treacherously betrayed Romola's disappointed love turns to despair. Concurrently her trust in Savonarola is destroyed when she realizes that he is falling away from his high principles. Only the stern realization that her duty lies in self-sacrifice eventually saves Romola. Tito illustrates George Eliot's favourite argument that things of fair outward seeming are worthless and even dangerous unless they are related to moral integrity. This study of the fascinating Greek and his unmasking, together with the awakening of the infatuated Romola, is the work of a lucid intelligence marshalling its powers in the service of ethical determinism. But of the atmosphere of Renaissance Florence there is hardly a trace.

By this time George Eliot's identity had become widely known and her work greatly esteemed. Its peculiar quality of moral earnestness, allied to the sense of positive spiritual endeavour, was dear to the Victorians. By her own moral responsibility she had glorified the novelist's art.

Indeed she owed a large part of her immense popularity to her didacticism. It would be wrong to attribute to the nineteenth century the later distatse for any form of preaching in literature. In Victorian England homilies of any kind were well received. All the arts aspired to the pulpit. And

George Eliot was able to gratify at once in a lively literary form the taste for inspiring sermons and exciting fiction.

Her novels were in Victorian eyes serious enough to be read before luncheon.

A fine trilogy of novels that followed *Romola* may be said to signalize the end of her literary career—*Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1867) and *Daniel Deronda* (1871). They burn with a passionate conviction and contain some of her best character-studies. *Felix Holt*, the only one of her novels to deal with British politics, is a study of political idealism. Felix, a noble-minded young reformer, deliberately chooses the life of a humble artisan in order to bring home to his fellow-workers that the hope of an improvement in their condition lies in education and learning to think for themselves, and not in this or that legislative programme. Contrasted with him is the conventional radical politician, Harold Transome, a decent, good-natured fellow whose political convictions, however, when he stands for parliament, are not incompatible with "treating" and other demoralizing practices. Esther Lyon, the heroine, has the task of choosing between the two men, and after a struggle she accepts Felix and the life of poverty to which his idealism has condemned him.

Daniel Deronda—"the utterly tedious Deronda"—as he has been called, is a study in racial idealism. The hero is a high-souled young man whose parentage is enveloped in mystery, who is strongly attracted to the noble Jew Mordecai and his sister Mirah, and is finally discovered to be himself of Jewish birth. Deronda has played a great part in awakening the latent idealism of Gwendolen Harleth, who is punished for not being true to what is best within her. She has married Hanleigh Grandcourt, an arrogant, selfish man, for his money, knowing at the time that there exist a woman and children to whom he has moral obligations. Grandcourt's brutalities drive Gwendolen to revolt and even to thoughts of murder, so that after his tragic death she feels morally guilty, much as Dorothea Casaubon does in *Middlemarch*. In this crisis of her fate Gwendolen looks to Deronda for hope, but he has resolved to devote himself to the cause of a national centre for the Jewish race, and to this end he marries Mirah. Gwendolen is left to find a sad consolation in resignation.

Middlemarch, written between *Felix Holt* and *Daniel*

Deronda and surpassing them both in interest, construction and in its lively ironical humour, is the study of idealism, but this time wasted idealism that fails to find a great cause to which to devote itself. George Eliot may have had herself in mind when in the prelude she alludes to Saint Theresa and may have thought, as she drew her superb picture of Dorothea's potentialities withering unused in the little provincial town, that this might have been her own lot—had she lacked the courage and yielded to convention when she met Lewes.

> Theresa's passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life; what were many-coloured romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel; and, fed from within, soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her epos in the reform of a religious order.
>
> That Spanish woman who lived three hundred years ago was certainly not the last of her kind. Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion. With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in the noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance and the other condemned as a lapse. Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than anyone would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse.

Middlemarch includes the biographies of some fifty people and has as its central theme the tragic waste of a woman's idealism and energies in the stifling trivialities of provincial life. The heroine's tragedy lies in her failure to find anyone great enough to use her devotion and enthusiasm. Her first husband, a scholar, lacks the power to love anyone but himself, while the second, the charming Ladislaw, is geared to no great purpose. Dorothea Brooke, austere, foolishly wise Dorothea, is an idealistic girl who burns to devote her life to some cause and falls in love with an elderly clergyman engaged in the stupendous task of "unifying all the mythologies of the world."

> Dorothea with all her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage. She felt sure she would have accepted the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony ; or John Milton when his blindness had come on ; or any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure ; but an amiable baronet who said "Exactly" to her remarks when she expressed uncertainty,—how could he affect her as a lover ? The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.

Dorothea, to whom "riding was an indulgence . . . and she always looked forward to renouncing it." seems to deserve to be married to Casaubon, whose table talk and love-letters are alike couched in an indigestible idiom. Here is Casaubon reproving the expedition of his gay young cousin Ladislaw :

> "No, he has no bent towards exploration, or the enlargement of our geognosis; that would be a special purpose which I could recognize with some approbation, though without felicitating him on a career which so often ends in premature and violent death. But so far is he from having any desire for more accurate knowledge of the earth's surface, that he said he should prefer not to know the sources of the Nile and that there should be some unknown regions preserved as hunting grounds for the poetic imagination."

After this gambit it is hard to resist the conviction that the star to which Dorothea has hitched her wagon is a damp parlour firework.

Marriage with Dr. Casaubon proves bitterly disappointing to Dorothea. On the honeymoon in Italy he shuts himself up in the Vatican Library and leaves her to a companion and a courier. Back in England she finds her "living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety ; a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint," an insufferable pedant, petty, jealous and vindictive, his vaunted intellect is shoddy and, even worse, his research is outdated by his ignorance of German. Inwardly he resents Dorothea's interest in his work because her genuine enthusiasm exposes the fundamental poverty of his mind, a truth he has spent his life concealing. The fate of Dorothea is paralleled by that of Lydgate, the idealistic young doctor whose high ambitions to devote himself to research are frustrated by his inability to resist the influence of Rosamond, his selfish wife.

When we first meet Lydgate he is indifferent to the glittering prizes the world can give to men in his profession and intent on extending the boundaries of knowledge. We take our leave of him at the end of the book, a fashionable physician with no interest in discovery, content merely to maintain a prosperous practice. Rosamond's physical loveliness has proved a fatal snare for him ; she imposes her social ambitions on him and he becomes the slave of her folly. Only his lowered spirits, slackened scruples and his embitterment reveal the extent to which he has betrayed his own ideal.

In *Middlemarch* there is humour and a vein of caustic irony which suggets that had George Eliot been less concerned with the moral purpose in human affairs she might have been a satirical novelist, anticipating and by the force of her genius —Samuel Butler. But her sense of the ridiculous is always being subordinated to the pressing need to point a moral. In the same way she is compelled to take the stuff of life and shape it rather too obviously towards some moral end.

It is one of her principal claims to fame that she is a "modern" novelist. Unlike the typical "instinctive" Victorian novelist, she is an intellectual writer. Her chief characters are scholars, politicians, artists, musicians, men of science and philosophers. She supplies much that is lacking in Dickens and Thackeray—intellectual discussion, concern with serious problems, politics and philosophy. Her subject-matter is nearer to that of *The Forsyte Saga* and *The New Machiavelli*

Principles were meat and drink to her and her mind was always active, analysing and generalizing on the basis of experience. For this reason her books are invariably constructed round a central idea which determines their form. Ready-made plots, coincidences, the dramatic stock-in-trade of wills, inheritances, long-lost heirs, mistaken identities, beloved by her contemporaries, played no part in her world.

Even more important than her contribution to the novel of ideas was George Eliot's use of a convincing, dynamic psychology in presenting her characters. She was the first Victorian novelist to depict a character from the inside and to portray realistically the spectacle of deterioration in people who are not intrinsically evil. Her most complex characters ring true because the changes and apparent contradictions in them are always firmly related as they are in life to some central principle—the hub on which the wheel of personality turns. She knows why ambitions are frustrated, why idealists desert their ideals, why the bright promise of youth so often fades into insignificance. It is because the nature is betrayed by what is false within itself. Thackeray had perceived this too, but he lacked George Eliot's burning moral passion and remained content to record satirically what he had seen of the pathetic weakness of the flesh. She, on the other hand, regrets the waste, and brings out the tragic implications of the betrayal.

Her sense of the tragedy in life is Aristotelean. Some hidden flaw, some weakness unseen by the outer world, unsuspected even by the possessor, undermines what is otherwise a good, perhaps potentially noble, character. What seems a hostile destiny is in reality the failure of the individual to be true to the best that is within him, his surrender to the inherent weakness. Recognizing this truth, George Eliot shows her skill in contriving situations that test her characters once the basic flaw, and its probable effect on the destiny, is discovered. The development of the character is life-like and no melodramatic voltas or psychological miracles are necessary to explain surface changes, for these are seen to be related to the central core. For example, Lydgate is betrayed by his innate dislike of any step which might prove disagreeable to himself—a weakness fatal in a man who wishes to dedicate his life to a cause which demands the sternest self-discipline. His lovely wife creates difficulties for him in his career and he takes the line of least resistance and betrays his ideal.

When all is said and done, and when due praise has been given to George Eliot for her creation of unforgettable "characters" like Mrs. Poyser and for her rich humour, her vein of irony and her insight into the working nature of personality, the fact remains that her supreme quality as a novelist is a certain high seriousness. She has a lofty conception of life, a belief that there is something in human beings that makes for righteousness, and that tragedy lies in the constant betrayal of man by himself. Like Browning, she is a moral optimist, but neither facile nor insincere. Her optimism, like his, springs from a conviction based on fundamental respect for what is best within and the certainty that the purpose of life is to secure the ultimate triumph of the good. "She stands at the gateway between the old novel and the new, no unworthy heir of Thackeray and Dickens and no unworthy forerunner of Hardy and Henry James."

Thomas Hardy, who was born at Upper Bockhampton, near Dorchester, in 1840, published his first novel in the year that *Middlemarch* began to appear. The scientific discoveries which had been given a rapturous welcome in the 'fifties and 'sixties were beginning to promote discontent in the 'eighties. Darwin, Huxley, Lyall and the engineers were busy transforming the Victorian conception of the universe and Thomas Hardy was among those who protested against the nightmare world of the scientists' imagination.

Thomas Hardy accepted the scientific picture of the universe and felt its spell, but it depressed him with its soulless indifference to humanity. He sensed the potential danger for human values in the current conception of the universe as a vast machine set in motion at some remote point in time and destined to run on until it ended in stasis before its final disintegration. His tastes led him away from the fever and fret of industry. His books almost ignore the new facts of the present-day world; their background is the eternal framework of the hills and the moors; all their vistas open upon the simple, unchanging realities, the neighbourhood of which throws light on the true relationship between the universe and man.

Hardy was in some respects a pagan for whom the consolations of Christianity made no appeal. Unable to refute the fact that scientific discoveries and the materialistic interpretation of history had annulled the power of providence and

discredited whatever gods there might be, he became a pessimist. From an early time he felt there was an obscure volition in the depths of things that curbed our individual destinies under a law greater than ourselves. Irrationally but characteristically Hardy saw a power behind the vast machine, but it was malignant; life was cruel and purposeless. It was, as Schopenhauer had maintained, a blind force that cared nothing for the individual. In Hardy's novels human beings appear to be in the grip of a superior power; sometimes it is nature, indifferent to man, sometimes malignant chance, often it is the tragic determinism of human desires. Whether his creed is fatalism or determinism he is haunted by the vision of necessity. He grasps it grandly, like a tragic poet, and illustrates its workings with unwearied persistence. This force selects the finest and most sensitive natures to break upon its remorseless wheel.

Hardy's peculiar sensitiveness to the changes in the Victorian *zeitgeist* may have been due to the strange mixture of blood that flowed in his veins. On his father's side there was Norman blood, and his family had suffered vicissitudes of fortune in its passage through the centuries. This may have inspired the melancholy, the nostalgia for the past and reverence for tradition that runs through the poems and the novels. The iron detachment, the aristocratic sense of form, as well as the strong feeling for mystery that consorted so oddly with Hardy's rationalism, may have derived from the same source. His mother came of sound yeoman stock and from her Hardy may have inherited his sense of kinship with the soil, his sympathy with all living things, his acute powers of observation and his subtle perception of atmosphere and locality. From this side too may have come the interest in practical things which gave him the power to transmute metaphysical experience into concrete terms that give the novels their solidity and living reality.

No other novelist can render the sights and smells of the countryside with such evocative sensuousness, or surround daily tasks with such intimate tenderness. No one before Hardy had made the landscape part of the story. His Dorsetshire, for which he retained the old name of Wessex, is a land of memories, where the hills are crowned with Roman camps, and where barrows hide even more ancient remains. It is a very old pagan part of England:

> Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes.

The landscape is always there in the novels, now grimly smiling, now frankly menacing, outstretching the little span of human life by immemorial aeons and dwarfing into pathetic insignificance the human tragedies played out before it as on a stage.

As an artist Hardy found himself soon enough. His early training as an architect, which he abandoned for literature in 1870, gave him a sure sense of construction. He built up his stories with powerful economy; there was little extraneous ornament but every phrase seemed to contribute to the final rhythm. From the beginning his architectural training revealed itself in the use of a precise vocabulary of description and a fondness for the exact and often rare word.

According to Hardy's own classification his novels divide themselves into three groups: the novels of ingenuity; the romances and fantasies; the novels of character and environment. To the first two groups belong such charming and pleasant tales as *Desperate Remedies, A Pair of Blue Eyes,* and *The Trumpet Major,* all written between 1870 and 1880.

His masterpieces *Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* belong to the third group—the novels of character and environment. An acute critic of Hardy, Lascelles Abercrombie, divided Hardy's chief novels into dramas and epics. In the dramatic novels, of which the first three are examples, the essence of the plot lies in the interaction of a number of different characters upon one another, a kind of complex pattern woven out of a number of different lives, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure,* the great epic novels, are concerned in the main with the unfolding of the tragic history of a single life. In these later books the essential originality of Hardy's temperament is shown in a more deliberate realism and a closer psychology while the increasingly dramatic struggle between man and the evil in things is waged in a dimming light.

His plots are, for the most part, simple. The passions he depicted are the elemental ones of love, greed, jealousy,

ambition, the thirst for power and knowledge, and the springs of action that move his characters are psychological. In the course of his development as a novelist Hardy's interest shifts from the outer framework of experience to the inner world of feeling. His novels become moral dramas in which the conflicts of wills, impelled by passions, predominate. But these conflicts are not entirely determined from within, they are disturbed and complicated by the repeated workings of blind chance. Chance in its purely malevolent aspect is an important though invisible character in every Hardy novel. Such a philosophy of life as this conjures up presupposes a Manichean idea of cruelty inherent in the pattern of the universe, and of a system with its own implacable laws that human beings ignore or deny until they are overtaken by an apparently hostile destiny and destroyed. Moral retribution is the law of the Hardy universe and all unknowingly his characters aid its workings. It exercises its remote control over their lives and every careless and irresponsible action brings, subsequently, a tragic harvest of pain and bitterness. Nothing can be avoided. And it is this insistent recognition of the part played by mischance and malignant fate in human afrairs that creates the peculiar atmosphere of hopelessness that engulfs his heroes.

The first of the dramatic novels of character and environment was *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), a study of a recurrent Hardy theme—the contrast between two types of love : the one selfish, violent and unscrupulous, but withal exercising a dangerous fascination, and the other patient, unselfish and devoted. The two loves are embodied in the characters of Sergeant Troy and Gabriel Oak. Troy, who has already deserted one woman and left her to die in childbed in a workhouse, marries the beautiful but wilful Bathsheba Everdene, with whom Gabriel Oak is in love. After the marriage he ill-treats Bathsheba and is murdered by Farmer Boldwood, who is also in love with her. Boldwood becomes insane, and Hardy, in whom pessimism had not yet overridden all other considerations, allows Gabriel and Bathsheba to be united.

The Return of the Native (1878), which added considerably to his growing reputation, clearly showed Hardy's increasing tendency to despair. Nothing in his own life at the time, certainly not his extraordinary success as a novelist, can explain the deepening gloom. But in these last works he

became obsessed with the tragic issues of human endeavour and persistently refused to admit the possibility that fate could sometimes be indulgent and grant wishes. Egdon Heath itself becomes symbolic of the doom of man. The description of the heath is loaded with a philosophy inspired by its sombre, elemental grandeur, its gloomy vastness in which every living thing seems to be swallowed up in the depth of the centuries.

> The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to raise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization which each advanced half-way. The place became full of a watchful intentness now ; for when other things sank brooding to sleep the health appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to awake something ; but it had waited thus unmoved during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis—the final overthrow.... Egdon Heath appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learned emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.

The story, which has the sombre heath as its background, is one of frustrated idealism and unhappy love. Clym Yeobright, a diamond merchant who has been living for some years in Paris, grows tired of his futile and artificial occupation, and returns to his native Egdon Heath, resolved to become a schoolmaster.

> He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of the individuals rather than the individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.

Clym begins to study, and is making great progress towards fulfilling his ambition, when his eyesight fails and he is forced to become a furze-cutter on the heath. This drives the beautiful, selfish Eustacia Vye, who has married him, after a brief infatuation, in the belief that she can persuade him to go back to Paris to despair. She resumes relations with her former lover, Damon Wildeve, who in his turn has

married Clym's cousin, the gentle, selfless Thomasin Yeobright to spite Eustacia. After the death of Clym's mother, for which Eustacia is indirectly responsible, she and Damon resolve to run away together, but they are drowned in the weir. Clym, despairing of happiness, finds his last vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher.

> Some believed him, some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else.

The grim sense of tragedy and frustration in the novel is relieved by the ultimate happiness of Thomasin, who marries the honest, loyal reddleman Diggory Venn.

Fine as these achievements in fiction were, they were overshadowed by a magnificent sequence of novels: *The Woodlanders, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Structurally considered, these novels are singularly impressive, for not since the creation of Lear had characters in fiction been led with such inevitable and inexorable control towards a tragic doom. But it was the philosophy embodied in the three novels that aroused a storm of contemporary protest. They are akin in spirit and they fulfil the tragic pessimistic philosophy Hardy had hinted at in his earlier works. Sombre chronicles of broken lives, of frustration, of all the pathetic futility of human effort when it pits itself against a hostile destiny. Time and again Hardy had implied that fate in this life seems to load the dice against the unselfish, loyal and gentle and against those who seek to realize a noble ideal, but never before had he presented a range of characters so completely dominated by mischance and directed by malignant fate. The Olympian remoteness from which the struggles of the victims are viewed gave an almost Greek solemnity to these realistic pictures, and increased the awful solemnity of these realistic dramas.

> So far as my experience goes [he once wrote], conclu sions about the universe do not affect the spirits, which-are a result of temperament. What does depress me is the sight of so much pain in the world, constant pain;

> and it did just as much when I was an orthodox churchman as now; for no future happiness can remove from the past sufferings that have been endured.

Both *Tess* and *Jude*, Norman Collins pointed out, were written

> as though cruelty to others were a raging tooth set in the writer's head. They were written when despair at the world's pain had mounted within Hardy's mind to a desperate defiance; at a moment when he had the invalid's instinctive hatred of the robust.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) is undoubtedly the finest of Hardy's novels, although it has never enjoyed the popular esteem accorded to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. In no other novel of his is the grim relentless march of ill-fortune through the life of the chief character so convincingly described. The story, too, is free from the overstrained emotionality and unnatural melodramatic psychology that flaws the other two.

The tragic drama is woven out of six main strands, the lives of Michael Henchard, Susan Henchard, Elizabeth Jane, Richard Newson, Donald Farfrae and Lucetta. It is as organically complete as anything written for the Greek stage. Henchard possesses something of the titanic strength and folly of Lear, and the drama in which he figures moves forward with an inevitable and relentless power from the spectacular opening to the terrible nemesis which ushers in the end.

Michael Henchard, a hay-trusser, gets drunk at a county fair and sells his wife and child for five guineas to a sailor, Richard Newson. Returning to his senses the next day, he tries unsuccessfully to find them, and, failing, takes a solemn vow not to touch intoxicants for twenty years. By his own efforts he emerges triumphant from the wreck of his early manhood, becomes a rich and respected corn merchant and eventually crowns his achievement by being made Mayor of Casterbridge. Then after eighteen years of effort and triumph Henchard finds himself in the grip of a remorseless peripeteia which is accelerated by the faults of his own nature, his impulsive anger, pride and stubbornness. He quarrels with his capable assistant, Farfrae, whom in his own dark sombre way he loves.

Farfrae becomes his successful rival both in business and love and marries the sparkling Lucetta, whom Henchard has wooed. He learns that Elizabeth Jane is not his child, but Newson's, and he turns against her. A freak harvest ruins him; his past becomes known and he takes to drink. For a time he is comforted by the affection of his step-daughter, to whom he is reconciled, but Newson returns and claims the girl and Henchard is left in poverty and loneliness.

Fate is not merely hostile to Henchard, it tortures him mentally, emotionally and physically, until the quivering nerves of his being can feel no longer. Those he loves and befriends are used as the agents of some strangely malignant force to bring about his downfall and destruction. There is a touch of almost unbearable pathos in the scene in which Henchard's unheeded wedding present to Elizabeth Jane on her marriage to Farfrae after the death of Lucetta is discovered:

> in a screened corner a new birdcage, shrouded in newspaper, and at the bottom of the cage a little ball of feathers – the dead body of a goldfinch. Nobody could tell her how the bird and cage had come there; though that the poor little songster had been starved to death was evident.

The bird's death is symbolic of Henchard's own end, lonely and desolate in a wretched hut on Egdon Heath.

Henchard is probably the greatest instance of masculine characterization in Hardy's fiction. He compels admiration chiefly through the tremendous force and energy of his character. Beside Henchard's monolithic strength and dignity, shot through with its dark streak of erratic harshness, Donald Farfrae appears glib and mean. In spite of his stubbornness and folly we cannot help liking the man for his bravery and his innate sense of justice. There is greatness in him. His courage is no mere brute force. He challenges fate heroically and misery can teach him nothing more than defiant endurance of it. Henchard, in short, fulfills Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero, "a man not eminently good or just yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice but by some error of frailty."

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles, a Pure Woman* (1891), Hardy's outlook became even grimmer. All the forces of a merciless destiny were now ranged not against a strong, obdurate nature that invited its doom, but against a woman

made for love and happiness. So intent was Hardy on hounding Tess and proving life pitiless and implacable that he overstepped the bounds of psychological probability. The book, as Henry James pointed out, is chock full of faults and falsity. Hardy's novels so far had included murder but not hanging; now the reader's heart was to be seared by the spectacle of a tender and lovable woman, dogged by misfortune, committing murder and paying the supreme penalty. It is extremely unlikely that in real life Tess would have stabbed Alec D'Urberville; it would have been so much simpler to have left him and returned to her husband. As it is, the bright blob of blood that leaked through the floor and printed itself like a gigantic ace of hearts on the landlady's ceiling is melodrama verging on farce. But Hardy had envisaged the tremendous scene of Tess's last night of freedom spent amidst the great pagan trilithons of Stonehenge, he had sensed the exquisite pathos of Angel Clare, forced to surrender to Justice the woman he had just learnt to love.

> "Let her finish her sleep," Angel whispered pleadingly, and they showed no objection.
>
> At last Tess awakened.
>
> "What is it, Angel?" she said, starting up. "Have they come for me?"
>
> "Yes, Dearest," he replied. "They have come."
>
> "It is as it should be," she murmurs. "Angel, I am almost glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me. I am ready."

Nothing, neither pity nor psychological realism, could have deterred Hardy from his purpose of throwing Tess to the gods; they kill her for their sport.

Hardy's imagination by this time seems to have been as much in the grip of a remorseless fate as any of his characters. The President of the Immortals, in Hardy's ironic phrase, might have finished his sport with Tess, but another victim was ready to be offered up in Jude Fawley, the pathetic hero of *Jude the Obscure* (1896).

This is the story, in Hardy's words, of "the war waged between the flesh and spirit." The intellectual aspirations of

Jude, a South Wessex villager, are thwarted by a sensual temperament, lack of character and the deadly play of circumstance. Early in life, while he is supporting his passion for learning by work as a stonemason, Jude is entangled in a love affair with Arabella Donn, a mere female animal, and entrapped into marrying her. Some time later she deserts him and he resumes his studies, aiming at becoming a priest. Fate intervenes again in the person of Jude's cousin, Sue Bridehead, a vivacious, intelligent young school-teacher, and he falls in love with her. Their lives follow a tragic pattern and both are blindly drawn into making decisions which cannot be revoked. Life turns sour, bright hopes become dim and ideals vanish in the sordid commerce of everyday existence. After the terrible scene in which the boy nicknamed "Father Time" hangs his little brothers and sisters in a macabre effort to save them from hunger and his parents from constant anxiety, it seems that the limit of horror has been reached. Sue, in an agony of self-abasement and remorse, leaves Jude and returns to her former husband. Jude himself is inveigled back to Arabella, takes to drink and dies miserably.

The publication of *Jude the Obscure* aroused a storm of controversy. An American reviewer wrote: "When I finished the story I opened the windows and let in the fresh air and I turned to my bookshelves and said 'Thank God for Kipling and Stevenson, Barrie and Mrs. Humphrey Ward.'" Hardy did not welcome the shafts of hostile criticism his grim philosophy had invited. "A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at," was his sour comment.

After this he wrote no more novels but turned to poetry and embodied his experience of human destiny in the epic drama *The Dynasts*. Hardy died in 1928 at the age of eighty-eight.

Notwithstanding the predominance of passimism in Hardy's philosophy, a passimism that was part of the European literary heritage in the nineteenth century, his true note is a rich and noble paganism. Hardy's understanding of the world, with both its humour and its grave fronting to fate, leaves him rather resigned, uncomplaining, filled with pity for his fellows, but calm with the courage of those who have not fed themselves on illusory hopes. Life may be a tragedy with a few interludes. Yet the philosophy of the old Dorset steer is stern, not weeping.

Hardy's art in the novel may be circumscribed (his characterization tends to be somewhat melodramatic), but it is great art despite his excessive use of coincidences. Every incident is calculated with unerring skills; the movement is controlled from the outset with the deliberation of conscious art. The style is as direct as the plot; its distinction deriving from the subject-matter. The novel in his hands becomes a dramatic reality; everything is felt with such intesity that the reader, absorbed by the experience, becomes part of it. In no uncertain sense are the novels cathartic in that they inspired pity and fear. But there is something more, there is poetry, the magic wrought upon the spirit by the alchemy of sense. Despite the universal presence of tragedy the atmosphere is nowhere morbid or "Websterian," for Hardy never fails to realize that beyond the human agony lies Nature and the Earth Spirit, whose vaster destiny dwarfs into insignificance the cruellest human fate.

George Gissing may lack the genious of the Brontës, George Eliot and Hardy, but he experienced certain aspects of life with the same passionate intensity. Moreover he represents a new phenomenon in English life—the *déraciné* intellectual. Early in life he was forced to taste the bitterness of poverty and to feel sharply the contrast between the ideal existence adumbrated by the great books of the world and the sordid commercial way of life that was swallowing up all serious endeavour. Born in 1857, he was educated at Owens College, Manchester, but left it in 1875, according to his friend Morley Roberts, because he was exposed as a thief. He stole apparently in order to provide clothes and drink for a prostitute he was to marry on his return from America. He stayed for a time in London and then went to America, where he endured the extreme poverty and misery reflected in many of his novels. After a short period at Jena, where he studied Philosophy, he returned to London, and in 1880 published his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, making, meanwhile, a precarious living by private tuition. His extraordinary diligence enabled him in the face of great difficulty to acquire an excellent knowledge of the Classics and he developed a gargantuan appetite for facts of any kind.

Gissing is a bridge between the old and the new schools of novelists. His writing is conventional in form, but he was fundamentally a rebel. His mind was scholarly and precise,

not intuitive and flexible; he is more often content to tabulate and record impressions than to communicate the thrill and the ache of the artist. He had a sense of wit, though he rarely gave rein to it, and of irony, but of humour, in the more subtle sense, very little. His understanding of women was limited. He could draw extreme types, the woman of the slums and the sensitive, reserved woman who has been sheltered from actual contact with life; but except in *The Unclassed* he shows no knowledge of the frank healthy-minded girl of quick perception who existed in the eighteen nineties when he was writing his novels.

Like another maladjusted near-genius, Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), Gissing had been endowed with abnormal sensitivity and then confronted with situations that could only heighten his faculty for suffering. He had the misfortune to belong to a new class that was growing up in the wake of a dying civilisation. In former times society had reserved learning for those who were financially free to enjoy it, or for whom it was prepared to make provision in a pluralist church or an unprofessional university. Now the blessings of education were spread broadcast, but it was no longer the poet, the scholar, the artist, society respected, but the engineer, the business magnate and the scientist. Men of Gissing's stamp, who with infinite labour gained knowledge and culture, found that what they had learned to set the highest value upon was actually a burden and even a detriment to their material advancement. Society had little to offer the poor scholar bred outside the University who lacked the means to keep himself alive. Hunger, poverty, bitterness and humiliation were Gissing's lot in the *fin de siècle*.

It is not surprising that his novels are almost all of them drab. There is nowhere to be found any trace, however dim, of the joy of life; he revelled sadly in mean streets. He suffered less from melancholy than depression. His outlook on life was clouded by his early struggles; in such books as *Demos, Thyrza* and *New Grub Street* he was at pains to illustrate the degrading effects of poverty on character.

His world was, like that of Dickens—a writer to whom Gissing is deeply indebted—the world of the swiftly moving rootless life in the metropolitan slums. But, unlike Dickens, he saw no humour in its grotesqueries; he awaited to miracle at Christmastide. His factual mind registered with scientific

precision the miseries about him. His characters, like those of Hardy, are in the grip of a pitiless destiny, only for Gissing the enemy was not a remorseless, indifferent cosmos, but the stark materialism, commercial values and the philosophy of "getting rich quickly." He knew from personal experience the malice of the east wind as it drove its knife-edge against unfed bodies shivering and coatless. Poverty, for him, was as unromantic as the grey ashen dust and refuse blown by the wind along the dreary, noisy streets of London.

It was inevitable in the circumstances that Gissing's mind should be directed towards social problems, the conditions and prospects that confronted the poorest classes in the slums. *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886) and *Thyrza* (1887) are sombre studies of the agony of mind the more sensitive are forced to endure in hostile or sordid environments. Intellectually Gissing moves near in these books to rationalism and although he never found satisfaction in this barren creed it sharpened his detestation of ritual, and of the artifices and hypocrisy he saw embodied in the Church of England. It explains his antagonism to the clergyman Whiffle in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*.

Grim as these novels are, they contain some masterly writing. John Morley, commenting on the description of the East End graveyard in *Demos*, says: "It contains a passage which is one of the most beautiful in modern literature. And there is genius throughout." Here is the passage, marked with the intense feeling that distinguishes Gissing at his best:

> Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them there is no day, only a brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and latter night. . . . The wind sails above the narrow tenements; the sandy soil, soaking in the rain as soon as it has fallen, is a symbol of the great world which absorbs their toil and straightway blots their being.

Yet Gissing's feeling for the ignominy of the poor did not make him sympathetic to radicalism or a friend to democracy. He saw the dangers of premature schemes of universal education. He knew from his own experience that few fates are more cruel than that of the man educated above his own

stationin life. The clamour for equality and universal suffrage sickened him. He loathed the mob, "the enemies of every man who speaks the pure English and does not work with his hands." *Demos* amounted to an attack on socialism, on democracy, on popular education and the demagogues it bred. Gissing was always splendidly loyal to his ideals. It was his sense of injustice rampant in the world that led him to prick the conscience of those in more comfortable places. But like his own Henry Ryecroft, Gissing was an aristocrat inborn. His attitude to the people was unambiguous :

> I am no friend of the people. As a force, by which the tenor of the time is conditioned, they inspire me with distrust, with fear ; as a visible multitude they make me shrink aloof, and often move me to abhorrence. For the greater part of my life, the people signified to me the London crowd, and no phrase of temperate meaning would utter my thoughts of them under that aspect. The people as country-folk are little known to me, such glimpses as I have had of them do not invite to nearer acquaintance. Every instinct of my being is anti-democratic, and I dread to think what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly.

To the fastidious mind of Gissing the good is ever the enemy of the best. At heart he remained a Renaissance humanist venerating intellectual aristocracy and resenting the approach of whatever challenged the supremacy of the highest. Latter he broadened his sense of human values by admitting the importance of feeling.

> Foolishly arrogant as I was, I used to judge the worth of a person by his intellectual power and attainment. I could see no good where there was no logic, no charm where there was no learning. Now I think that one has to distinguish between two forms of intelligence, that of the brain and that of the heart, and I have come to regard the second as far the more important.

His later novels continued to portray poverty at the lowest level, grim, sordid, soul-destroying, and irremediable within an unjust society. *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), *Born in Exile* (1892) and *The Odd Women* (1893) are more able achievements than his earlier books but equally joyless.

The year 1880 was one of great personal stress and strain for Gissing, and his health, ruined by undernourishment and overwork, began to affect his writing. A ripe classical scholar, who with leisure and tranquillity of mind would have amassed learning and lived happily and harmlessly, he had been forced to become a literary hack. It was therefore in a mood of intense despair that he started *New Grub Street* In this book he depicted the struggle for life amid the jealousies and intrigues of the literary world of his time and the blighting effect of poverty on artistic endeavour. Only the shoddy and unscrupulous are successful. Jasper Milvain, a facile, clever writer of reviews, owes his success to his synical acceptance of materialistic standards. The man himself is without loyalty and honour, as his subsequent treatment of Marian Yule proves. Contrasted with him are Harold Biffen, a scholar, and Edwin Reardon, the latter an autobiographical study. Reardon, the author of two fine works, is hampered by poverty and the lack of sympathy shown by his wife, Amy, who measures success in any field by its pecuniary rewards. Failure to gain recognition and the consequent indifference and desertion of his wife drive Reardon to an early grave. His widow marries Jasper, who, representing the triumph of self-advertisement over artistic conscience, is consistently successful because he accepts the world's values. Gissing is as inexorable as Hardy in depicting the fate of the finer, nobler and more sensitive characters; failure and neglect lie in wait for those who refuse to prostitute their ideals to modern commercialism.

The Odd Women reveals a special aspect of modern life, the hapless lot of the "superfluous" woman. Gissing describes their struggles in life, their growing despair, and the misery of the girl who marries without love for the sake of a home.

Some amelioration of Gissing's material condition took place in the eighteen nineties, and after this the possibilities of travel to his beloved Italy mellowed his outlook, softened the bitter asperity of his temper and made him more genial.

In *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), the imaginary journal of a recluse who enjoys a release from poverty and worry amid books, memories and reflection, Gissing represents his own aspiration. The real Gissing emerges into the light. There is neither form nor story in these ruminations of a man of letters who recalls the days of

struggle with grinding poverty when he had to earn his living by his pen.

> Old companion, yet old enemy ! How many a time have I taken it up, loathing the necessary, heavy in head and heart; my mind shaking, my eyes sick-dazzled ! How I dreaded the white page I had to foul with ink ! Above all on such days as this when the blue eyes of spring laughed from between rosy clouds, when the sunlight shimmered upon my table and made me long, long all but to madness for the scent of the flowering earth, for the green of the hillside larches, for the singing of the skylark above the downs. There was a time—it seems further away than childhood—when I took up my pen with eagerness; if my hand trembled it was with hope. But a hope that fooled me for never a page of my writing deserved to live. I can say that now without bitterness. It was youthful error and only the force of circumstances prolonged it.

How deeply poverty had eaten into Gissing's soul is shown in the following passage :

> You tell them money cannot buy the things most precious. Your commonplace proves that you have never known the lack of it. When I think of all the sorrow and barrenness that has been wrought in my life by want of a few more pounds per annum than I was able to earn I stand aghast at money's significance. . . . I think it would be scarce an exaggeration to say that there is no moral good which has not to be paid for in coin of the realm.

It had been Gissing's peculiar destiny to develop a taste for the Classics in a slum environment. His heart was in the past, in a world that seemed, seen in the magic mirror of literature, fresher, cleaner, more honourable; an aristocratic world, an instinctive culture. He had always lived more in the past than in the present, but the beauty of that imagined world made the squalid, sordid world of everyday life unbearable by contrast. He could escape and did, but at what a price ! While he was literally starving in London he spent his days in the British Museum.

> I read Apuleius, Lucian, Petronius and the Greek anthology, Diogenes Laertius and heavens know what ! My hunger was forgotten, the garret to which I must return to pass the night never perturbed my thoughts.

The world he knew intimately through literature brightened the darker moments of his life. Memories of it helped his cultured heroes, protagonists of the past rather than of the future, in their everlasting struggles against the selfish, grasping, petty majority. Reardon is speaking for Gissing when he cries:

> Poverty can't rob me of those memories. I have lived in an ideal world that was not deceitful, a world that seems to me, when I recall it, beyond the human sphere, bathed in a divine light.

In an especially dark period of his life Gissing wrote:

> I dare not read a book about Rome, it gives me a sort of angina pectoris, a physical pain, so extreme is my desire to go there.

He did go there; he saw Baiae as Horace saw it; he sat by the Ionian Sea (and wrote a book about it); he looked on the mountains that the Greek colonists had looked upon. Before he died he had the experience of the living ecstasy of the old world that so often, in his imagination, had helped him to endure the agony of spirit the new world was inflicting on those who were too sensitive to its deformities.

The world of Henry Ryecroft is one of comparative contentment, mirroring Gissing's own late-discovered happiness. During this period he wrote a historical novel of Rome in the sixth century, *Veranilda*, which was published posthumously in 1904. But it is to the London novels and to the autobiography that both the student of sociology and the lover of Gissing will continue to turn.

The bitterness of his earlier books was inspired not only by the memory of his own circumstances but also by his passionate love of his fellow creatures. The hardships he suffered he could have borne, but he could not with equanimity tolerate the sufferings of the others in the underworld. His demand for justice was incessant, his prayer that some happiness, at least, should be the lot of every human being was always on his lips, and he cried it aloud in everyone of his books. He deserves to be remembered as the first novelist to penetrate into the mental hell reserved for the intellectual misfit in modern society.

The Great Awakening

TOWARDS THE end of the nineteenth century the novel had established itself as a literary monopoly. During the last two hundred years it had absorbed characteries, diaries, poetry, biography, fantasy, polemics, economics and sociology. No frontiers, intellectual or imaginative, checked its advance. Oscar Wilde regretfully noted that almost everyone capable of reading took to writing, for there was a ready market for fiction of all kinds. Certain subtle changes in consciousness ensured that even the veriest tyro in fiction had in some ways a more effective psychological equipment for his task of presenting character than the great novelists of an earlier generation had possessed. Improvements had taken place in the technique of story-telling, crudities had disappeared and a new exactness in the use of special vocabularies gave an air of authority to fiction. In the eighteen seventies and eighties a group of writers dominated the literary scene who used the novel with a new deliberation, exploring its values and keenly relishing the possibilities its sensitive and flexible medium offered both for characterization and artistic form.

Henry James in *The Art of Fiction*, published in 1884, noted the change that had taken place in the world of the novel :

> Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that; it would take more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel, as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it, had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, *naif*; and evidently, if it is destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naiveté* it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel as a pudding is a pudding, and that this was the end of it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation – the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened.

What had hitherto been tentative in the novel became deliberate; the importance of the novel as one of the fine arts "deserving in its turn all the honours and emoluments reserved for the successful professions of music, painting, architecture" was at last recognized. Walter Pater, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, Conrad and George Moore all treated the novel seriously and gave to its composition the scrupulous literary care formerly given to poetry and the drama. At the same time theory-mongers and satirists seized upon the novel as a means of propagating ideas and, realizing the almost limitless possibilities of using it as a vehicle for social criticism, combined story and realistic characterization with attacks on the foundations of contemporary society.

Chief among the satirists was Samuel Butler (1835-1902), who employed the novel with devastating effect to discredit the past, and warn the future. Butler lashed the Victorian age, ridiculing what he considered were its vain pretensions, exposing its hypocrisy and deriding humbug in education, politics and religion. Possessing the least orthodox and, perhaps, the most original mind of his generation he allied it to a crankiness that belonged to the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century.

Butler's youth coincided with the hey-day of the Victorian era; he experienced its triumphant self-confidence and its imperious order. He reacted against it and his originality found itself in rebellion. But Butler challenged his age not on the subject of particular wrongs but on the very principles which nourished its self-satisfaction. Nothing was sacrosanct to the truculent Pyrrhonist, for his preoccupation with the search for truth led him to reject everything but the exclusive principle of doubt. He stood out in the decade before Bernard Shaw as the fairly complete type of the unsocial intellectual at war with a hostile generation whose prejudices he attacks through a series of converging manoeuvres. His temper was aggressive and his irony often harsh in the books in which he impugned religion, ethics, feelings and the irrational traditions and habits which go to the making of society. The tremendous legacy of irreverence Butler bequeathed to the following generation was not unprofitably invested.

Samuel Butler, grandson of Dr. Butler the great headmaster of Shrewsbury School and Bishop of Lichfield, was

born in 1835 and educated at Shrewsbury and St. John's College, Cambridge. If Butler is to be believed, his father, Canon Butler, did not like children, overstrained them intellectually and attempted to mould their characters on the principle that it was necessary to break a child's will early or "he will break yours later on." Whether or not Canon Butler was the monster his son presented it is abundantly clear that certain experiences in childhood resulted in sharpening Butler's sensibility to injustice and made him more than usually rebellious to parental, or indeed any, authority.

The advice given to parents in *The Way of All Flesh* throws some light on his upbringing :

> To parents who wish to lead a quiet life I would say: Tell your children that they are very naughty—much naughtier than most children. Point to the young people of some acquaintances as models of parfection and impress your own children with a deep sense of their own inferiority. You carry so many more guns than they do that they cannot fight you. This is called moral influence, and it will enable you to bounce them as much as you please. They think you know and they will not have yet caught you lying often enough to suspect that you are not the unworldly and scrupulously truthful person which you represent yourself to be; not yet will they know how great a coward you are, nor how soon you will run away if they fight you with persistence and judgment. You keep the dice and throw them for your children and yourself. Load them then, for you can easily manage to stop your children from examining them. Tell them how singularly indulgent you are ; insist on the incalculable benefit you conferred upon them, firstly in bringing them into the world at all, but more particularly in bringing them into it as your own children rather than anyone else's. Say that you have their highest interests at stake whenever you are out of temper and wish to make yourself unpleasant by way of balm to your soul. . . . You hold all the trump cards, or if you do not you can filch them. ... True, your children will probably find out all about it some day, but not until too late to be of much service to them or inconvenience to you

Butler's parents intended him for the Church, but he developed scruples concerning the efficacy of infant baptism and asked to be allowed to eschew the priesthood. His own wish was to be a painter, but his family thought this desire was dangerously Bohemian and insisted that he choose a profession from the respectable trio – law, medicine or teaching.

After a brief but unsuccessful experience as a teacher Butler decided to leave England and take up sheep-farming in New Zealand on the understanding that his father would finance the experiment. The first night on board ship he did not say his prayers—a gesture both of defiance and renunciation. It signalized his final rejection of the faith in which he had been brought up. And for the rest of his life Samuel Butler was to seek for a rational religion to replace the one he had rejected. At the fountain-head of Christianity was the resurrection of Christ. This Butler could not accept; after carefully scrutinizing the evidence the miracle for him vanished and he substituted for the faith of the centuries a hypothesis that Jesus did not die on the Cross and that it was a living person that reappeared to the sight of the disciples.

His speculations on this theme provide most of the material for his satiric romance *Erewhon Revisited*—a study in religious myth-making. For the rest of his life he was engaged in assailing with deadly irony the Church and its doctrines, its ministers, the sentiments and practices of the faithful. Mental torpor infuriated him, for he saw in it both the indifference that led to the suppression of originality and truth and the breeding-ground for the hypocrisy and convention which he saw around him.

In spite of his cynical clear-sightedness on matters of faith and tradition, Butler was, personally, extremely gullible. He was fatally attracted to men who had a flair for living and was always liable to fall under the spell of those who had developed conscious charm. In some strange way friendship with them seemed to enhance his own inner shrinking depreciatory self. Thus it was that he came to be exploited by Pauli, a highly developed parasitic type he met in New Zealand, whose incessant demands for money at one time reduced Butler to indigence. Bernard Shaw is, perhaps, right in urging that in spite of Butler's dislike of his father:

> the rectory-born lust for patronage and charity was in his blood and he had absolutely no conscience as to how he demoralized other people provided he could make them dependent pensioners.

In 1864 Butler returned to England from New Zealand. Sheep-breeding had proved successful and Butler, now financially independent, prepared to devote himself to his many

interests, not the least of which was a love of foreign travel. He was, among other things, a lover of Handel's music and a skilled performer, a student of painting who exhibited his pictures, an amateur philosopher who anticipated Henri Bergson's theory of the *élan vital* and restored metaphysics to psychology, and a vigorously unorthodox scientific thinker who challenged Darwin. His general attitude was one of protest against the Darwinian banishment of mind from the universe; he believed in the supremacy of the will and maintained the transmissibility by heredity of acquired habits.

Sometimes Butler's unorthodoxy and sturdy independence of mind led him to sponsor strange theories. One of the most curious was that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman. He spent some years studying the problem while exploring the Mediterranean and came to the conclusion that the poem had its origin at Trapani in Sicily and that the authoress had introduced herself into the poem as Nausicaa. *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, published in 1897, was received in pained surprise and silence by the scholars. Richard Garnett permitted himself the comment that if a man were so unfortunate as to hold such ideas he owned it to his fellows to keep quiet about them. But the one thing Butler could never do was to keep quiet. His ideas were always developed with thoroughness and expressed with complete disregard of accepted opinion.

Although principally engaged in writing a series of works on scientific controversy, *Life and Habit, Evolution Old and New, God the Known and Unknown, Unconscious Memory* and *Luck and Cunning*, Butler made an important contribution to the novel in *The Way of All Flesh* and in his two satiric romances *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*. Hitherto satirists in fiction had been content to expose the follies of individuals, to criticize the workings of society and to arouse sympathy for its victims. Butler, however, attacked the systems, institutions and principles. In his three novels he waged war relentlessly on the whole system of belief on which English life depended for its security and validity—belief in the family and belief in religion.

Although it was not published during Butler's lifetime, *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) was begun in 1872 and finished in 1873. Thus it was contemporary with *Life and Habit* and may be taken as a practical illustration of the theory of heredity.

Except for the episodes of the imprisonment and the marriage of Ellen, which belong to fiction, the novel was autobiographical, and Butler even went so far as to include one of his mother's letters—for Christina Pontifex is Mrs. Butler to the life—daydreams, histrionic love of situations and all. In the self-righteous, hypocritical humbug Theobald Pontifex, Butler portrayed his father, Canon Butler. To overcome the artistic and psychological difficulty of presenting himself at once as a child and as a critic of his environment Butler invented a sympathetic observer, Mr. Overton, who is the narrator throughout. Overton, a grown-up Ernest, gives the author's point of view of the characters and situations and heightens the pathos by his clear understanding of Ernest's unhappy childhood.

The Way of All Flesh is the first attempt to "debunk" the Victorians by subjecting one of their most cherished institutions, the family, to a merciless scrutiny. Behind the imposing facade of family love Butler found hypocrisy, deceit, malice, cruelty, spite and ignorance. Pharisaical tyranny concealed itself behind parental care and the blind worship of staid respectability replaced the natural cravings of the heart. He showed, too, in the episode of Ellen, how imperfect was Christian charity when confronted with the weaknesses of the flesh and how insensitive were supposedly 'good' people to the generous impulses of the soul.

Here was a novel that exposed unsentimentally a typical middle-class Victorian childhood and revealed the inherent falseness in the Victorian position—its failure to live up to its loudly vaunted principles. A dry-eyed iconoclast dethroned the household gods. Scene followed scene grim and ironic. Theobald's reluctant courtship of Christina, his unsuccessful shifts and evasions to escape the matrimonial noose, the tragi-comedy in the coach at the start of the honeymoon, the brutal treatment of the children mistakenly believed to be the only way to keep them to the straight and narrow path of virtue, all the meanness and unscrupulous behaviour of parents who fear to be natural with their children lest they lose caste. Ernest's life at school and subsequently at the University, where he becomes the victim of a set of religious hypocrites, is depicted with unsparing irony.

Many of Butler's pet theories on life are given an airing in *The Way of All Flesh*. He disapproved of academic

education, maintaining that boys would be far better served if their parents sent them out into the world to gain practical experience before they went to college. Much that passed for education in his time he regarded as futile, an opinion that was to be re-echoed by Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. Ernest is the pathetic result of parental solicitude and expensive education. Both at home and at the University he is so carefully preserved from knowing anything that he falls an immediate prey to specious theorists and plausible swindlers. Prepared by his parents for a world of pious illusions and trained to an impeccable rectitude, his values fail to stand the test of experience and he makes a fool of himself when he is let loose in a world the real nature of which has been concealed from him.

There is a note of peculiarly felicitous irony in the magistrate's address to Ernest, who, suddenly reacting against the prolonged suppression of his instincts, has insulted a young woman, mistaking her, in his ignorance, for a prostitute.

> "Ernest Pontifex, yours is one of the most painful cases that I have had to deal with. You have been singularly favoured in your parentage and education. You have had before you the example of blameless parents, who doubtless instilled into you from childhood the enormity of the offence which by your own confession you have committed. You were sent to one of the best public schools in England. It is not likely that in the healthy atmosphere of such a school as Roughborough you can have come across contaminating influences; you were probably, I may say certainly, impressed at school with the heinousness of any attempt to depart from the strictest chastity until such time as you had entered into a state of matrimony. At Cambridge you were shielded from impurity by every obstacle which virtuous and vigilant authorities could devise and even had the obstacles been fewer, your parents probably took care that your means should not admit of your throwing money away upon abandoned characters. At night proctors patrolled the streets and dogged your steps if you tried to go into any haunt where the presence of vice was suspected. By day the females who were admitted within the college walls were selected on the score of age and ugliness. It is hard to see what more can be done for any young man than this. For the last four or five months you have been a clergyman and if a single impure thought had still remained within your mind, ordination should have removed it; nevertheless

not only does it appear that your mind is as impure as though none of the influences to which I have referred had been brought to bear upon it, but it seems as though their only result has been this—that you have not even the common-sense to be able to distinguish between a respectable girl and a prostitute. If I were to take a serious view of my duty I should commit you for trial, but in consideration of this being your first offence, I shall deal leniently with you and sentence you to imprisonment with hard labour for six calendar months."

The Way of All Flesh enjoyed an enormous popularity and became the model for many novelists intent for discrediting an age which, in spite of its worth, obvious greatness and manifold achievements, had not succeeded in being forgiven.

Erewhon (1872) was written over a period of ten years and began life as an article on "Darwin Among the Machines," which Butler contributed to the *Press* newspaper at Christchurch. In the first chapter the author drew upon his memories of sheep-rearing in New Zealand and he revealed himself as an expert story-teller with a power to create atmosphere and hold interest by artfully contrived suspense. The painstaking realism in his description of his hero's efforts to overcome resistance both natural and supernatural in an attempt to reach the mysterious land beyond the mountains recalls Defoe.

At first it seems that Butler intends to write a Utopian fantasy in rivalry with Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race,* for his hero is lost in admiration of a people who appear to be magnificently healthy in their pagan simplicity, not dwarfed and disfigured by industrial conditions ; but the satiric purpose soon unfolds itself.

Erewhon is rich in satire and pawky humour. The most notable feature in the Erewhonian system is the paradoxical substitution of physical ailments for moral obliquity. Crime is regarded as a form of sickness, neither disgraceful nor punishable by law ; but illness of any kind is severely punished and no plea that it is hereditary is allowed. All the arguments hard-headed Victorians were accustomed to bring against the hapless victims of misfortune and "economic laws" were twisted, with startling effect, into an exposure of sheer inhumanity when applied to what were considered, by his generation, natural afflictions. Thus consumption in Erewhon is a serious crime, while embezzlement or forgery are matters

for condolence and a visit to the Straighteners for moral therapy. Just as the courts of law will punish a culprit without inquiring into the degree of his responsibility for his crime, those of the Erewhonians punish a sick person without inquiring into his responsibility for his illness or without paying the slightest attention to his heredity.

In the chapter devoted to the World of the Unborn and the Birth Formula there is admirable satire on parental tyranny, which Butler argues would only be justified if the Erewhonian belief were true that the unborn pester the living and are entirely culpable, since they insist on being born although they are informed in their own world of what will happen to them in this one. In Erewhon the signing of the Birth Formula by an infant, or rather his representative, absolves the parents from any responsibility for his future.

Religion comes under heavy fire in the chapter on the Musical Banks. We are let into the souls of ecclesiastics; they are human, weak, crushed by a mission which ought to rouse enthusiasm and yet only produces torpor. For all practical purposes churches are musical banks chiefly patronized by the women of the family and in the currency of which there is little faith. The pious, speculating on eternal rewards, receive drafts on the hereafter in exchange for cash. But so readily does the popular mind take to the marvellous that the most negligible nucleus of fact brings about the instantaneous crystallization of myths and a cult. Once founded on error a religious organization maintains itself by means of cynicism, credulity, cowardice and interested motives. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge with their worship of the Classics are satirized in this country of Nowhere in the Colleges of Unreason where a hypothetical language only is taught, the inestimable advantage of which is that it is good for nothing.

In the famous chapter on the machines Butler showed something approaching prophetic insight into the problems of the future. Like the Europeans they so much resemble, the people of Erewhon at one time invented machinery, but frightened by a treatise of one of their philosophers proving that the machines would eventually dominate men they destroy them all, go back to hand labour and pass the most stringent laws forbidding their reintroduction into the country. Not even a watch is allowed, and the only evidence to show

that the Erewhonians were once industrialized is to be found in their museums.

After many exciting mental encounters with the Erewhonians the narrator finally escapes from the country in a balloon of his own construction accompanied by an Erewhonian lady with whom he has fallen in love.

Nearly thirty years later Butler wrote *Erewhon Revisited* (1901), a far better constructed and homogeneous book but one which lacked the variety and brilliance of *Erewhon*. It was, however, even more bitterly satirical at the expense of religion in general and Christianity in particular.

In a preface to the revised edition of *Erewhon* Butler compares his two satiric romances :

> There is no central idea underlying *Erewhon* whereas the attempt to realize the effect of a single supposed great miracle dominates the whole of its successor. In *Erewhon* there was hardly any story, and little attempt to give life and individuality to the characters; I hope that in *Erewhon Revisited* both these defects have been in great measure avoided. *Erewhon* was no organic whole; *Erewhon Revisited* may fairly claim to be one. Nevertheless though in literary workmanship I do not doubt that this last-named book is an improvement on the first, I shall be agreeably surprised if I am not told that *Erewhon*, with all its faults, is the better reading of the two.

In the sequel to *Erewhon* the narrator, or, to give him the name by which he is known to the Erewhonians, Higgs, is driven by an overmastering desire to revisit that country after an interval of twenty years. To his horror he discovers that his ascent in a balloon has been held miraculous, a religious myth has grown up round it and he himself is now worshipped as the Child of the Sun—a reference to his light skin and hair. At the time of his return to Erewhon a great temple is on the point of being dedicated to him. The manner in which public credulity has been exploited by Professors Hanky and Panky of the College of Unreason, and the new religion adopted by the musical banks, is told with consummate irony. Relics have been discovered, dogmas established, heresies proscribed, perverted doctrines attributed to the Sunchild, while the former teachers of the hypothetical language, Hanky and Panky, now dispute over the correct rendering of the Sunchild's prayer. The version "Forgive us

our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," although traditional, is rejected as being contrary to reason and human nature. It should run, according to the professors, "Forgive us our trespasses but do not forgive them that trespass against us." Appalled at the mischief he has so unwittingly done, and goaded on the day of the dedication by Hanky's sermon, Higgs attempts to explain the truth to the misguided people, and is very nearly burnt at the stake in consequence. Fortunately, he is hurried away by friendly hands and for a second time is forced to flee from this strange and yet very familiar race.

Butler's fame as a writer and satirist would undoubtedly have been greater had he not been eclipsed by his chief disciple and publicist Bernard Shaw, who admitted his own indebtedness to Butler and rebuked the critics who insisted on tracing original ideas to continental sources when an Englishman had given birth to them.

In a way it would be true to say that Butler suffers from his originality. On almost every subject he was the precursor of ideas that later men developed and treated more amusingly. Shaw could give an epigram a finer point, and could at all times turn Butler's cider to sparkling champagne. But it was Butler who first headed the revolt against mechanistic philosophies, attempted to restore metaphysics to psychology, led the neopagans against the despisers of the body, put an end to unnatural reticence and, in short, set in motion the forces that within a few decades were to sweep away the accumulated prejudices and beliefs of an age.

As an ironist Butler was, perhaps, heavy-handed. Though capable of brilliant exposition, he lacked delicacy of touch, his humour was too sardonic, and his sustained and caustic denunciations of conventional beliefs kept his ideas from being generally accepted in his own day. His choice of the novel, however, as the medium for his finest satire was a significant tribute to the power and prestige of his literary form.

Hatred of parental tyranny had made Butler more than ordinarily resentful of whatever appeared as orthodox and traditional, and from this personal factor he derived the impetus to engage in reckless controversy that led him, among other enterprises, to damn Darwin, anticipate Freud and transfer the *Odyssey* to feminine authorship. Rarely can paternal absolutism have conferred greater incidental benefits.

George Meredith (1828-1909), a Victorian novelist of great power and distinction, was as interested as Samuel Butler in current psychological, philosophical and scientific ideas. Unlike Butler, he was a poet and a romantic, and he cared passionately for individual men and women and so was far better equipped to create vital fiction and become a great novelist. In common with most of his intellectual contemporaries, Meredith accepted the current theories of evolution not with the pessimistic regret of a Hardy or a James Thomson, but seeing in them the glorious promise of a new spiritual dawn. Evolution on the physical plane would be meaningless, he argued, without a corresponding evolution of the spirit. Nature for Meredith was no mere blind force indifferent to the quality of life it so recklessly brought into being; rather it was the expression of something spiritual which used men and women as the vehicles of a creative purpose. Somewhere between the "ascetic rocks" which symbolized the sterile denial of the flesh and the "sensual whirlpools" that engulfed the spirit, a course could be set by which men would create a race nobler than any yet imagined.

The same seriousness that Meredith gave to the problem of life itself underlies his conception of the novel as a literary type. Fiction, he believed, was doomed to extinction unless it speedily embraced a philosophy. His own philosophy found magnificent expression in a series of novels written over a period of forty years. This philosophy might be described as an attempt to reconcile the new disturbing scientific thought with the human idealism which for Meredith alone sanctified and justified life on earth.

Meredith was no puritan. Salvation, he was certain, could not come by way of life-denying ordinances and renunciation of the flesh. He condemned, as caustically as Butler, the prudery, the false and unnatural reticences that served his generation as weapons against unwelcome truths. In particular he protested against the blank refusal of the age to admit the physical rights of women.

> The capaciously strong in soul among women will ultimately detect an infinite grossness in the demand for purity, for infinite spotless bloom. Earlier or later they see they have been victims of the singular Egoist, have worn a mask of ignorance to be named innocent, have turned themselves into market produce for his delight, and have

> really abandoned the commodity in ministering to the lust for it, suffered themselves to be dragged ages back in playing upon the fleshly innocence of happy accident to gratify his jealous greed of possession, when it should have been their task to set the soul above the fairest fortune, and the gift of strength in woman beyond ornamental whiteness.

Yet Meredith was no pagan sensualist. Flesh existed for spirit, spirit must express itself through the flesh. But, unlike some twentieth-century exponents of fleshly doctrine, he did not consider the flesh wiser than the spirit, nor did he advocate any irrational religion of the body. His cry was always "for brain, more brain," so that the intellect could learn to understand and help the great purpose of spiritual evolution.

Meredith's conception of this purpose was not unlike the gospel of vitalism Bernard Shaw preached in *Back to Methuselah*. Man, he believed, was on earth in order to transcend himself, to create the superman. To accomplish this purpose he needed a fit mate, and the laws that governed social life impeded this purpose by setting up the wrong ideals of womanhood. Meredith's championship of woman, his demand for her emancipation, his respect for her intelligence, hinged upon what he considered to be her significant role in bringing into existence a more glorious race. "Are they not of a nature warriors, like men?—men's mates to bear them heroes instead of puppets? But the devouring male Egoist prefers them as inanimate, overwrought polished pure-metal precious vessels, fresh from the hands of the artificer, for him to walk away with hugging, call all his own, drink of, and fill and drink of, and forget that he stole them."

Meredith, like Peacock, was no believer in facile utopias; in fact he shared his famous father-in-law's contempt for doctrinal perfectionists. Human life was in his eyes a progress to the stars. Glory and joy lay in the effort the soul made to rise superior to its own apparent limitations. There is a certain austerity in his vision of life as an eternal struggle in which no external agency could interpose, in which there is no solace in defeat, and in which happiness lies in strength eternally spending and eternally renewing its power.

George Meredith was born in Portsmouth in 1828, the grandson of Melchizedek (the great Mel) Meredith, a

prosperous tailor and naval outfitter whose social aspirations were somewhat of a handicap to his business. He lived beyond his means, kept horses and hunted, seldom sent in a bill and died leaving large debts behind him. A streak of snobbishness in Meredith made him curiously ashamed of his tailor grandfather, and he maintained throughout his entire life so absolute a secrecy on the subject of his origin that when he became famous and wrote *Evan Harrington* none of his contemporaries suspected that the novel was autobiographical and Meredith made no acknowledgment that it was so. No one knew better than Meredith the shifts and stratagems, the inventions and innocent deceits and evasions, practised by those whose first duty to themselves is to conceal their origins.

Not that he personally had any reason to reproach his parents for anything beyond their unfortunate associations with the tailoring trade, for they indulged him and spoilt him and surrounded him with countless tokens of love. But it is possible there was a streak of morbid psychology in Meredith, for he was clearly obsessed with this problem of pride in birth and many of his novels are concerned with its evil results. It was perhaps fortunate that part of his education was undertaken by the Moravian Brotherhood at a school in Neuwied. This school had been founded in 1756 for a sect that had affinities of belief with the Quakers. Here the educational aim was to practise what you preached and do as you would be done by. The influence of this establishment upon Meredith's youthful mind must have been profound. "There cannot be any goodness unless it is practised goodness" was always part of his philosophy.

The moral training of the Moravians gave him an outlook which overrode narrow religious prejudices and taught him the value of liberalism and good manners. There he imbibed the spirit of charity and universal love, and this modified his pride and arrogance even if it did not succeed altogether in eradicating it. Moreover, life in the Rhineland filled his mind with a wealth of romantic and poetic associations. Perhaps it was here that he learnt to worship Nature with a pure and intense devotion.

Marriage did not bring Meredith much satisfaction, although he enteted into it with all the ardour and passion of an intensely romantic nature. His bride was the beautiful young

widow of a naval officer and daughter to Thomas Love Peacock. She was witty, literary-minded, an amateur poetess ; and Meredith, enthralled by the strong enchantment of her physical beauty, saw in her an intellect brilliance fit to mate with his own. He was oblivious of anything but Mary Nicoll's fascinations. He ignored the dangerous instability of her temperament, sentimental and sarcastic by turns ; her uncompliant, argumentative disposition. "He had the lady with brains ! He had : and he was to learn the nature of that possession in the woman who is our wife." The comment is made on Sir Willoughby Patterne after he obtains the hand of Laetitia Dale, but Meredith undoubtedly had himself in mind when he wrote it.

Instead of the happiness and quiet intercourse of daily life, the two brilliant young people began a battle of wits that made them nervous and irritable and exhausted them. They married in 1849, and ten years later Mary left Meredith and ran away to Capri with an artist. Her husband never forgave her and refused to see her when the returned. His psychological record of the strange conflict between them of will, intellect and passion found poetic expression in his tragic poem *Modern Love,* which was published soon after her death in 1861.

Yet the alliance, in spite of the misery it caused, was not without advantage. Mary inspired the lovely, witty women who adorn the pages of his novels ; she gave him the rapturous experience of first love he immortalized in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* ; and intellectually she made it possible for him to understand women. From his father-in-law, the friend of Shelley, the man whose graceful song and brilliantly satirical novels had delighted the discerning of his time, Meredith drew Dr. Middleton in *The Egoist.*

In 1856 Meredith published *The Shaving of Shagpat,* a brilliant oriental extravaganza ; but his earliest novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,* published in 1859, was written in what must be called the liberation of the separation from his wife. Oddly enough, the novel tells the story of an impassioned first love. Sir Austin Feverel, deserted by his wife, is left to bring up his son Richard. He resolves to keep the boy from corrupting influences by forcing him to submit to a despotic parental system of education and surrounding him

with constant vigilance. The breakdown of the system at adolescence is the underlying theme of the book, which describes Sir Austin's rejection of Lucy, with whom his son falls deeply in love because, although endowed with every natural charm, she lacks the high birth he requires in his son's wife. His opposition drives Richard and Lucy to a secret marriage, and when he discovers this Sir Austin unscrupulously works on his son's love for him to secure the separation of the young couple.

The finest thing in the book is the description of how Lucy and Richard share the rapt experience of first love—innocent, amazeful and unreasoning. Meredith's natural astringency of mind and style safeguards the episode from sentimentality. All his emotion went to the making of it, and from the first sentence, "Above the green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the weeds" the reader surrenders to the spell and lyrical intensity of what has been called a "once in a lifetime piece of writing." All the idyllic freshness of Meredith's art is found in an episode of Elysian enchantment.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel was praised by George Eliot, but most of the other critics were inclined to find fault with it on the ground that the book "is not true to life or human nature, only true to an abstract and arbitrary idea."

Evan Harrington, which followed in 1861, was autobiographical. Evan's father is a tailor of Lymport, and the novel is concerned with the attempt of Evan's sister, who has married a Portuguese nobleman, to launch her brother on "high life" and conceal the undesirable connections of which she is ashamed.

Rhoda Fleming (1865), a study in feminine psychology, was followed in 1871 by *Harry Richmond*, another novel concerned with the delusions of grandeur. The father of Harry Richmond is the son of an actress and of a royal personage. He becomes obsessed with the idea of the royal blood in his veins and displays a lunatic's cunning in the pursuit of his monomania. A man of unrestrained imagination, amusing gifts and little scruple, his one passion in life is to obtain an exalted position for his son. The central feature of the story concerns the romantic attachment of Harry to the

Princess Ottilea and his father's manoeuvres to overcome the obstacles to this absurd match. Harry is subjected to every conceivable humiliation as the results of his father's pretension, but ultimately marries the typical English girl that his paternal grandfather, a bluff of old squire, has designed for him.

Beauchamp's Career was published serially in 1875 and appeared in volume form the next year in 1876. This study of a young man's political idealism and his quixotic excesses both in the cause of humanity and the cause of love is finely done. But Beauchamp's death from drowning while he is attempting to rescue a small child from the sea is unnecessary and suggests that Meredith was at a loss to find a fitting ending for the story.

In the full surge of truimphant creativity, Meredith next produced what must always be regarded as his masterpiece, *The Egoist* (1877). To provide the author of *The Egoist*, as Robert Louis Stevenson happily put it, God had first to create gentleman, and then give him genius." The story of *The Egoist* is, unlike many of Meredith's novels, simple in the extreme, yet as exciting as the best of mystery stories. To the very last chapter the fortunes of war are undecided. Will Sir Willoughby be the victor in the long-contested struggle for male domination or will Clara escape from the imminent and hated marriage? Superb displays of rapier-like wit enliven every page.

Although there is everything to delight the most exacting fiction-reader — constancy, inconstancy, elopement, secret passions, loyalty and devotion—*The Egoist* was written for the author, not for the reader. It represents the uniqueness of Meredith. It is impossible to think of it as the work of any other writer. The style is the man. If any other novelist had essayed this style of writing he would indubitably have failed, yet Meredith succeeded magnificently. His dialogue—once the art of reading it is mastered—rings wonderfully true: the characters could not talk in any other way.

The novel is a comedy in which the central figure is the egoist himself, Sir Willoughby Patterne, rich and handsome, with great position in the country but insufferably selfish and fabulously conceited. Many young men claimed to have been the original. Robert Louis Stevenson, a great admirer of Meredith, listened to some of the chapters and exclaimed, "Own

up—you have drawn Sir Willoughby Patterne from me!" The reply was, "No, no, my dear fellow, I've taken him from all of us but principally from myself."

Sir Willoughby is Meredith's finest creation; blood, flesh and spirit work in him to produce a rare perfection. But from the stort of the story he is a marked man. "You may as well know him out of hand as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexible figure, do what we may with him." The Comic Spirit and its attendant imps lie in wait for Sir Willoughby, and their volleys of silvery laughter re-echo through the air at the sight of him. For he is the supreme example of egoism. "If this line of verse be not yet in our literature:

> Through very love of self himself he slew,

let it be admitted for his epitaph."

Although the Comic Spirit is the instrument of Sir Willoughby's discomfiture Meredith's real opposition to his hero is rooted in moral disapproval of egoism. He shared with George Eliot the opinion that a human act once set in motion flowed on for ever to the great account, for "our deathlessness is in what we do, not in what we are." To this dynamic conception of responsibility the egoist opposes his supreme felicity, "possession without obligation." The egoist is an end in himself; he seeks to take for his own private satisfaction the beauty, courage and vitality that should be allowed to play their part in the furtherance of the race. It is significant that Clara Middleton finally perceives the full force of Willoughby's egoism when he tries, while they are still engaged, to bind her by an oath to remain perpetually celibate should he predecease her.

Meredith, who tells the story in the third person, is preoccupied with the hero throughout. From his first appearance as the ardent, admired philanderer condescendingly accepting the worship of Laetitia Dale, sweeping off an heiress, losing her but gaining a greater prize in Clara Middleton, the "exquisite rogue in porcelain." Meredith hounds him on and on, driving him relentlessly through all the circles of whatever hell is reserved for the egoist; through jealousy and public derision, through despair and ignominy; to plunge him at the last into uttermost darkness. The twice-jilted Willoughby is

driven to ask the hand of the despised Laetitia, who, from being the flattering mirror of his own soul, has become his harshest critic. Willoughby, the idol of his aunts, of the county, of so many female hearts, is forced for fear of even worse slights to marry a woman without love for him, without pity; a woman, cold and unsmiling, who has given him the neglected ardour of her youth and now, disillusioned and indifferent, accepts him to please his aunts. For the egoist this is the deadliest punishment of all—to know himself unwanted.

Contemporaries complained that Meredith could not tell a story, could not draw lifelike characters, would not use plain English or let his people talk like plain Englishmen. How could he when his own style of conversation was artificial and overcharged with literary ornament? There had been nothing in the novel like his style, "chaos, illumined with flashes of lightning," a continuous sparkling of epigram and image.

After such a feast of fine things—continuous magniloquence, witty sayings, colourful images, the ordinary reader is likely to turn for relief to plain dullness. Meredith is so intent on being amusing he is apt to bore just as by his dazzling brilliance he not infrequently succeeds in darkening counsel. He blinds by excess of light. Instead of leaving the reader to find his own way to understanding the characters and the story Meredith encumbers him with so much help that in the end he perplexes and bewilders.

Meredith's prose is often obscure and difficult because he is not only a thinker but a rhapsodist. He makes no concession to the reader, who must possess an understanding both intuitive and analytic, for his creation of character is a poetic creation. Meredith saw people as symbols *sub specie aeternitatis*, and his powers of observation are so sure and acute that he can surround his symbols with the thousand attributes and gestures that make them credible and individual.

Poetic experience was, to Meredith, the quintessence of experience, refining away dross and heaviness and transmuting life into fire and air, light and radiance. It is not surprising that his prose often possesses a luminous quality, as in his description of the double-blossom wild cherry in the spring:

> She turned her gaze to where the load of virginal blossom, whiter than summer-cloud in the sky, showered and

drooped in clusters so thick as to claim colour and seem, like higher Alpine snows in noon-sunlight, a flush of white. From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes perched and soared. Wonder lived in her. Happiness in the beauty of the tree pressed to supplant it and was more mortal and narrower.

The Egoist was the first of a series of novels written in what came to be known as the essentially Meredithian manner.

In his next two novels, *The Tragic Comedians* (1880) and *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), Meredith chose themes that were highly topical. The first is based on the account given by Helene von Dönniges of her tragic love-affair with the political firebrand Ferdinand Lassalle, who was killed in a duel. The second exploited a contemporary English scandal.

Diana of the Crossways reached three editions in the space of three months. Public curiosity was aroused by the story and the personalities, and Meredith enjoyed the unaccustomed distinction of being talked about at dinner-tables and even read by society. His novel owed its popularity to the theme, which was an adaptation of the romantic story of the lovely and celebrated Mrs. Caroline Norton, Sheridan's granddaughter. This lady, separated from her husband, who had treated her badly but whom she refused to divorce, was something of a feminist and wrote pamphlets on behalf of women. The allegation, often since repeated but authoritatively denied, that she had sold a Cabinet secret (Peel's resolve to abolish the Corn Laws) to *The Times* was one of the *causes célèbres* of the year. Everyone recognized her in Meredith's Diana. Perhaps there was something in the fate of Diana that satisfied Victorian *schadenfreude*, for the "new" woman who carved out a career for herself was still a novelty. She was, as it were, still on trial, and having accepted her with reluctance the Victorians were ready to pounce with infinite glee on any sign of moral instability and instinctive weakness.

Diana of the Crossways represented one of Meredith's strongest efforts to forward the emancipation of Victorian womanhood, yet the reader comes to the conclusion that a woman cannot stand alone and triumph. From a literary point of view *Diana* is inferior to *The Egoist*, although, like all Meredith's work, it is instinct with beauty, wit and poetry.

In a trilogy of novels—*One of Our Conquerors, Lord*

Ormont and His Aminta and *The Amazing Marriage*—written towards the end of Meredith's literary career, he showed an especial concern with the relationships between men and women when these were influenced by considerations of pride of birth, social position, and the question of legitimacy. It was a problem from which he could not escape. Marriage in his eyes involved so much more than mere animal attraction or domestic felicity; it was the means whereby spiritual progress could be achieved. He saw in male supremacy the main threat to that progress. Only the intellect could further Nature's purpose. The men for whom women were simply "parasites" and "chalices" retarded that purpose by denying women intellectual freedom. From the primitive woman-hunter to the most refined voluptuary they prevented the union of body and soul which alone constituted, in Meredith's eyes, true marriage; and they claimed for themselves a worship that in reality should belong to race and life.

One of Our Conquerors (1891) is the study of the tragedy of illegitimate birth. Victor Radnor, as a young man, marries a rich, elderly woman and then falls in love with her beautiful young companion, Natalia Dreighton. They live together (his wife will neither die nor divorce him), and their daughter Nesta learns of the stain on her birth. Nesta arouses the love of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, the heir to an earldom, but he is for a time repelled when he learns the story of her birth. He is contrasted with Dartrey Fenellan, who belongs to a type already presented in Vernon Whitford in *The Egoist*. Dartrey has a juster perception of Nesta's true worth, for she is endowed with splendid qualities of character and she eventually marries him, but not before her parents, who have lived under the constant threat of social exposure and the resultant ostracism, die in tragic circumstances.

Lord Ormont and His Aminta (1894) presents a picture of the tragic unhappiness and injustice occasioned by a man's false pride in his birth and his position in society. Ormont falls in love with Aminta Farrell, whom he meets while on a trip to Spain, and marries her in spite of her inferior birth. Aminta idealizes her husband and burns the incense of hero-worship before him. Lord Ormont has envisaged a life of travel with his young wife on the Continent, and when Aminta tires of this and they are forced to return to London he cannot bring himself to introduce her to society or publicly

recognize her as his wife. Instead he leaves her to cultivate a shady and fast-living set. In Lord Ormont's newly appointed secretary, Matthew Weyburn, Aminta recognizes a friend and admirer of her schooldays, and in spite of honourable restraint on both sides force of circumstances drives them together and Matthew falls in love with her. Lord Ormont repents of his unjust treatment of Aminta, but too late, for she defies convention and goes away with Matthew to keep a school in Switzerland. Some years later, just before his death, Lord Ormont is brought to forgive them.

At fifty-five Meredith's mind was at the height of its powers, but his physical health was failing, and *The Amazing Marriage* (1895) is to all intents and purposes his last important work of fiction. The theme is again the tragedy of pride in birth and how it spoils the appreciation of what is truly noble and valuable in woman. Lord Fleetwood meets Carinthia Jane Kirby, daughter of the "Old Buccaneer"; she is a strange creature known as the "beautiful Gorgon" who has been brought up with her brother in the wilds of the Austrian mountains. He proposes to her the first day he sees her and is accepted by the artless girl. Fleetwood soon repents of his mad freak and trusts and expects she will do the same. But Carinthia's uncle and guardian is anxious to be rid of the burden of a penniless niece and holds Fleetwood to his word. After the marriage he leaves her indefinitely at an inn, refuses to see her and treats her with every circumstance of insult. The birth of her child only serves to increase his resentment. Meanwhile Gower Woodseer, a poor philosopher, who met Carinthia and Fleetwood in the Alps and with whose parents she takes refuge in her distress, tries to bring about a reconciliation. Eventually he succeeds in softening the heart of Fleetwood and in making him realize what a treasure he has lost, but the change comes too late. Carinthia accompanies her brother to the Spanish War as a nurse and Fleetwood in despair goes over to the Church of Rome, "carrying all his personal and unentailed estate to squander it on images and dogma." He dies of his austerities.

Meredith, who spent the greater part of his life at Flint Cottage, Box Hill, died in 1909, loved and honoured and admired by his contemporaries. He gave a positive philosophy to the novel ; he also gave it style. He was a novelist who knew how to tell a story glamorously. Admittedly he could

be reproved for the obscurity and complexity of his later work ; he was not content to shine, he desired to dazzle ; he would say nothing simply or easily, but always sought the oddest language. The relentless concentration of his thought revealed itself in staccato sentences and in an endless series of tortured images. And yet

> to those who are quick to follow his suggestion he gives in a few winged words the very spirit of the scene, the inmost secret of a mood or passion. . . . His dialogue is full of life and reality, flexible and rich in the genuine unexpected, marked with the keenest distinctions. His style . . . at its best is so beautiful in simplest Saxon, so majestic in rhythm, so noble with noble imagery, so pregnant with meaning, so vital and intense, that it must be ranked among the supreme achievements of our literature.

To enjoy Meredith's rare gifts as a novelist requires a suppleness of mind, a delight in lively wit and humorous observations of mankind, a richly sensuous appreciation of words, of their magic, their colour and their manifold associations. But above all he requires of his reader a passionate love of living. He himself overflowed with the sense of being alive. Brain and senses were intensely active ; everything was experienced at white heat and all that he wrote was charged with radiance. Meredith heightens our consciousness of everything, of Nature, of love, of beauty, of vitality. He has no use for the sluggish, the flat and insipid ; he depicts character so ardently that while we are under his spell we feel its mystery and wonder; we find ourselves caught up in the vast glittering webs of his plots and know the exhilaration of unravelling them. As a delineator of woman he stands alone among nineteenth-century novelists for the sheer poetic intensity with which he realized her infinite variety. It is truly said "the star of Meredith burns and is alive with constant fire." He is the Congreve of the novel.

Curiously enough, the English novel during the most consciously imperialistic phase of modern English history was indebted to two writers, neither of whom was English—namely Joseph Conrad, a Pole, and Henry James, an American.

Teodor Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski, known to the world by his pen-name of Joseph Conrad, came of a family of

Polish landowners who lived in the Ukraine and lost most of their estates during and after the Napoleonic wars. Conrad's early years were much disturbed; his father was involved in the last Polish rebellion of 1861 and was exiled to Russia, taking with him his little son born in 1856. Both father and mother died while Conrad was young, and he was looked after by an uncle whose memory he always regarded with the greatest affection. Growing up in a world that could offer neither happiness nor content, Conrad early in life came to learn that death was often the least hardship men had to bear. From his father he derived an austere and aristocratic code of honour—unswerving loyalty to truth and trust. All else was vain and must be endured with quiet stoicism. Early contact with suffering awakened in Conrad a strong sense of compassion and a deep understanding of the temptations that beset men under the impact of misfortune.

He went to school for a time at Cracow, where he came under the spell of books. He devoured Polish and French literature, and showed considerable interest in books of travel. Maps were for him a prelude to enchantment. The tales of great explorers thrilled him and excited in him a desire to share their experiences. It was not, therefore, surprising that his spirit should yearn to travel, and when, in his sixteenth year, he saw the sea for the first time it seemed to him that his soul entered into a mysterious marriage with that great symbol of elemental freedom. From an early age Conrad resolved to become a sailor, and at last he was able to conquer the scruples of his uncle, who sent him to Marseilles for his initiation. This was in 1874, and for the next few years Conrad sailed under the French flag, making several journeys of the West Indies, going down to the Mediterranean, and gun-running for Don Carlos off the Spanish coast. Memories of these experiences can be found in several of his books, notably in *The Arrow of Gold* (1919). It was during this period that Conrad, who had accumulated heavy debts, attempted to commit suicide although at the time he allowed it to be thought he had been wounded in a duel. The event haunted him with a sense of guilt and remorse and may explain his deep insight into characters too romantic to accept the commonplace and yet too inherently weak for heroism.

Canrad first came to England in 1878—he landed at Lowestoft and served for five months in a vessel trading

between that port and Newcastle—and in 1879 he made his first voyage to Australia, serving before the mast as an able-bodied seaman. Intuitively he knew that his spiritual home was the Far East, and he made several attempts to reach it. His Eastern voyages, which afforded him so splendid a background for some of his finest work, began in 1881, when he set sail for Bangkok. The voyage ended off the coast of Sumatra through a fire at sea—*Youth* (1902) is a reminiscence of this experience—and the crew had to take to the boats. Conrad went home as a passenger by way of the Suez Canal but presently he made another Eastern voyage which took him to Madras and Calcutta. "The mysterious East faced me, perfumed, silent like Death, dark like a grave." He crossed India, and at Bombay became second officer of the *Narcissus* for her voyage home by the Cape of Good Hope, a voyage immortalized in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

After other voyages along the wild coasts and up the dark rivers of Borneo, Celebes and Sumatra he went to Bangkok and took command of the *Otage*, in which he sailed the Pacific for about two years, again gathering material for future books. Conrad left the East for good in 1889, and the next year made his memorable voyage up the Congo, which resulted in *Heart of Darkness*, an interesting study of subconscious fear of the powers of evil. In 1894 he left the sea and devoted the rest of his life to literature, although he never ceased to wander, visiting France, Switzerland, Capri, Corsica. Poland and finally the United States, although he made England his home.

Conrad was twenty-six when he first learnt English in order to take a job on an English ship. The English language attracted him by its wealth of synonyms, its flexibility, its richness of colour and the light and shade its dual vocabulary, Latin and Saxon, made possible. He shared Flaubert's fastidious regard for the exact word, and he would spend hours balancing the effect of the vigour and emotional power of the Saxon monosyllables against the melody and complex suggestiveness of Latin and French derivatives. Not unnaturally his ear preferred the longer subtle cadences of the French and Latin words, and his use of them gave his prose a richness and sonority. At times it is apt to sound a little overelaborate, too consciously constructed, to an English ear. Conrad congratulated himself on writing English like a native.

In point of fact he wrote it far better, often giving to its adjectives and expressions a freshness or quaintness that stimulated interest in what he said.

After the publication of his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, in 1895, he quickly rose out of complete obscurity into fame. In masterly creation of character, in depth of insight, in beauty and power of language he stands among the supreme figures of English literature. His books, which are concerned with the fundamental problems of existence, are written in an undeviating grand manner.

Various literary influences reveal their presence in his work : Flaubert, Maupassant, the Russian novelists and Henry James. Conrad's art is a composite one which allies the novel of adventure with the objective spirit of French naturalism. It is a self-sufficient art. Conrad had no other object but to transmit impressions of reality, be it good, bad, indifferent, cruel, mean or magnificent. But he is not only concerned with externals, he is equally concerned with the inner self. His psychological curiosity finds scope in the analyses of simple, humble souls perplexed by the cruelty of fate ; in spite of noble impulses and the desire to do right, he saw that human beings were constantly betrayed by their selfishness into becoming wolves to one another. His aim artistically was to portray, with the inevitability of life itself, man's wretchedness and helplessness.

Conrad brought to the English novel a fine objectivity ; he had observed men and life closely, especially men under adverse conditions, men in the grip of elemental fear. He had observed the processes of mental and moral decay and watched attempts at regeneration foiled by inner weakness and betrayed by self-delusion. His world was not that of provincial life, subdued and regulated, but life in the East, where even the toughest natures yielded to despair and grew corrupt. Atmosphere is as important in a Conrad novel as landscape in Hardy, an exotic atmosphere to which he had succumbed and whose sinister enchantment he was well fitted to describe. Conrad renders all the glitter of the East, its heavy perfume, its mystery, its unwholesome fascination. Far more important than his power to describe the exotic was his poetic conception of it as a symbol of moral evil. Without any attempt at exact definition, simply by the tremendous force of suggestion, Conrad manages to convey the sickening

sense of evil that lurks in the dark places of the world.

The Nigger of the "Narcissus," written when he had gained command of English and had mastered a technique unfamiliar to him, may be regarded as a characteristic achievement illustrating his power to create atmosphere. It is in fact a novel of atmosphere rather than of action. Conrad had a great affection for it and was wont to say, "By these pages I stand or fall," and, while he did not consider it his finest book, he regarded it as a unique study in which he had distilled the quintessence of his experience as a seaman, a book no one else could have written.

There is no plot. The story consists solely of the description of a voyage from Bombay to London in a sailing-boat across the Indian Ocean, round the Cape of Good Hope and so northwards to England. Much of the book is autobiographical, for Conrad did make such a voyage, and the ship in which he made it was called the *Narcissus.*

What action there is in the story is psychological—the human drama in the lives of men brought face to face with the open sea in its most malign and terrible mood.

The pivotal points on which the drama turns are a Cockney agitator and a Negro dying of consumption. The effect of these two on the crew, already demoralized by discomfort and fear, is subtly analysed. Uncertainty whether the Negro is really ill or only shamming to escape work insidiously infects the others and poisons the atmosphere about them.

> He fascinated us. He would never let doubt die. He overshadowed the ship. Invulnerable in his promise of speedy corruption, he trampled on our self-respect. He domonstrated to us daily our want of moral courage ; he tainted our lives. Had we been a miserable gang of wretched immortals, unhallowed alike by hope and fear, he could not have lorded it over us with a more pitiless assertion of his sublime privilege.

Donkin, the "sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage and endurance and of the unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company," exploits the situation for his own advantage to undermine authority. During the prolonged storm off the Cape, which nearly destroys the ship, he shirks his responsibilities and under the pretence

of creating sympathy for the Negro stirs up mutiny. The description of the storm, which takes up a considerable part of the book, is magnificent and in its power to evoke the terror of the sea invites comparison with *Typhoon*.

At last the *Narcissus* comes to dock and the men disperse.

> A gone shipmate, like any other man, is gone for ever; and I never met one of them again. But at times the spring flood of memory sets with force up the dark river of the Nine Bends. Then on the watres of the forlorn stream drifts a ship—a shadowy ship manned by a crew of shades. They pass and make a sign in a shadowy hail. Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning from our sinful lives? Good-bye, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell to yell in a westerly gale.

There is neither plot nor feminine interest in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*; but because of its profound humanity, its extraordinary visualization, and the poetic splendour of its diction it is an absorbing book that lingers in the memory. Its true greatness lies in its epic quality. It is Conrad's supreme epic of the sea, of ships, and of man's fight with the elements. The sea is almost sentient in this book, enslaving men's hearts and torturing their bodies. Never did Conrad's language achieve more magnificent cadences than in the jewelled descriptions of this prose poem, descriptions that seem to focus the twenty years of his sea life in a visionary moment.

As Conrad developed as a writer his plots grew more complicated, but they always have as their starting-point some fact, some actual observation, some incident in which he had been involved or of which he had an eye-witness account. Once stimulated, Conrad's imagination worked on the scene, gradually laying bare the psychological implications and stripping the souls of those taking part in it of every pretence.

Conrad's later novels contain much of his best work and raveal his preoccupation with the problem of moral evil and how it affects the human personality.

In *Nostromo* (1904) a strange story of adventure and daring exploits in the revolutionary broils of the South American Republic of Costaguana is used as a background for a subtle and poignant study of the conflict between moral

idealism and material interest. The narrative is, for Conrad, simple and straightforward, but it serves effectively to reveal the inescapable loneliness of individuals and their unhappy destinies once they become involved in action.

The Secret Agent (1907), which is coming to be more generally recognized as a masterpiece of Conrad's art, is a new kind of detective novel. The plot of external action is concerned with a notorious attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory. But the real interest lies in Conrad's presentation of the personality and mental atmosphere of the secret agent and of the interplay of motives that underlie human actions.

Conrad's peculiar genius for anatomizing men and their motives is again shown in *Under Western Eyes* (1911) in his interpretation of Russian feelings and ways of thought. A group of political refugees settle in Geneva to continue their political plotting, and the atmosphere of distrust and treachery engendered by them is conveyed with something approaching the power of Dostoievski.

Chance (1913), which shows the influence of Henry James, is a story of two kindred souls who fail to recognize each other and who are caught up in an intricate web of misunderstanding.

Victory (1915) is a brilliant study of a similar theme. The hero Heyst, a quietist Swede who preaches abstinence from action, since the world is evil and man can do no good by taking part in it, is as rare a personality as Captain Anthony, the poet-hero of *Chance*. Heyst rescues a girl, Lena, from infamy, and the story of the slowly awakening love between them is set on an outpost in the ocean archipelago. The invasion of this lonely island by three ruffians, each a subtly differentiated study in evil personality, in search of gold is described with a sense of breathless expectancy and sickening horror.

Few novelists have excelled Conrad in creating an atmosphere of suspense and horror not by lurid descriptions but by the subtler power of suggestion.

Conrad's philosophy of life is informed by a nineteenth-century pessimism. He is more stoical than Hardy and refrains from reproaching the universe for the cruel lot of man, since the universe itself is as helpless and bound as much as man by the iron laws of necessity. Fate works through the

minds of men and is reflected in the world that mind has created. There may be gods, but their will is beyond scrutiny and they demand of us nothing but resignation. This attitude leads him to take a greater interest in weakness than in strength, and significantly enough he has created no heroic characters. A pitiless observation of men revealed little but cowardice and corruption. Human beings are shown in his novels deluding themselves with false hopes, blind to their true natures and ultimately succumbing either to their own unacknowledged weaknesses or to the destructive powers vested in that last superb illusion—Nature herself. Death alone offers to men, uncertain in their allegiances, despicable in most of their ways, the sole possibility of triumph. Thus in *Lord Jim*, the young Englishman who in a moment of panic deserts his apparently sinking ship and loses his honour, finally redeems himself by an honourable death.

All Conrad's novels are tragic because his mind was filled with a profound sense of the pity of life. The finest things in life die unfulfilled, the noblest aims are never achieved, and everywhere man, in spite of his desire for happiness, creates misery and suffering. An atmosphere of infinite sadness broods over his books ; men are isolated and lonely, a prey to perplexity and disillusionment, rarely able to break through their loneliness into sympathy and understanding.

Another non-English novelist—the Europeanized American, Henry James—was one of the greatest exponents of the "art of fiction," both in theory and practice. Born in New York in 1843 of ancestry originally both Irish and Scottish, he received a desultory education in New York, London, Paris and Geneva, finally entering the Law School at Harvard in 1862. His father, a writer on questions of theology, was a follower of Swedenborg, while his brother, William James, was a distinguished philosopher and psychologist. Europe made a strong appeal to James, and he settled over here in 1875 and for more than twenty years lived in London. In 1898 he moved to Lamb House, Rye, where his later novels were written. Under the influence of an ardent sympathy for the British cause in the War James was naturalised in 1915, becoming a British citizen. He died in 1916.

James, approaching the task of writing fiction with a profound respect for the medium he intended to employ, brought to the novel conscious artistry, aesthetic refinement, sensuous

subtlety and an elaborate perceptiveness. He set out his principles in an essay entitled *The Art af Fiction,* which was published in *Longman's Magazine,* September 1884. For James the novel was the "best form of art to express the truth of life," but to express that truth as it appeared to the creative temperament one thing was essential—freedom.

> A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression of life. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say.... The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant—no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes.

A little later in his essay James insists on the need for experience.

> Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. t is the very I atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.

What James understood by experience is illustrated by the little anecdote he quotes on the subject, which, incidentally, is typical of his own practice.

> I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having, once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur,* some of the young Protestants were seated at a table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but

> that moment was experience. She had got her impression, and she evolved her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French; so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality . . . . If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe.

James did not ignore the importance of the moral purpose of the novel, but he believed it should be implicit, not palpable; any attempt to preach in fiction must inevitably destroy the integrity of a work of art.

> There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. . . . No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground; if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illumine for him many of the mysteries of "purpose."

Its freedom from convention and its flexibility explain the appeal of the novel to James: "The other arts in comparison appear confined and hampered; the various conditions under which they are exercised are so rigid and definite." The only condition James was prepared to attach to the composition of the novel was that it should be interesting. Otherwise the complete freedom of this particular art from literary conventions and formal restraints enabled it to offer a splendid opportunity to the novelist. "Enjoy it as it deserves; take possession of it, explore it to its utmost extent, reveal it, rejoice in it. . . . Remember that your first duty is to be complete as possible—to make as perfect a work."

The Art of Fiction showed very clearly how serious James was about the craft of story-telling. He desired to achieve in art completeness about any given situation; he aimed at an ultimate artistic perfection which should reveal the reality of an imagined situation. Never for one moment did he underestimate the difficulty of achieving such completeness "for [there are] ever so many more of the shining silver fish afloat in the deep sea of one's endeavour than the net of the widest casting could pretend to gather in." But this perpetual

concern with completeness explains his fastidious care in writing his novels, his search for the exact phrase to convey his meaning, the right image or metaphor to communicate an emotion to the reader. He was the first novelist in the English language to believe that how a thing was said was just as important as what was said.

Few writers have been better equipped for the task he undertook. James possessed great intelligence, a rare sensibility and a peculiar sympathy with the refinements of tradition and breeding. This sympathy accounted for his ready acceptance of European values, it was his reason for succumbing so quickly to the siren songs. Europe was full of the past, rich in accumulated history; everything was old, every step he took in Europe set vibrating poignant and romantic memories. Such a world provided the strongest stimulation for the sensitive voluptuary that stirred in James's heart. Civilization, he knew, was a phenomenon of ever-increasing complexity.

> It takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition, an endless amount of tradition to make even a little taste, an endless amount of taste, by the same token, to make a little tranquillity. Out of the tranquillity induced by working in a good literary tradition develops form.

Life in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century had much to recommend it to Henry James. It had a grace and charm sadly lacking in the New World and its inhabitants possessed a conscious complexity—what James called "thickened motive," "accumulated character"—that fascinated him as a painter of life. There was, in short, a rare patina on life in the old world, and in his first enthusiasm James felt that no price could be too high for so precious a possession.

A moral dilemma, however, soon disclosed itself. European standards, so obviously right considered culturally, were nevertheless incompatible with New England puritanism, which would not tolerate any lapse from strict morality or permit any tampering with its narrow concept of what was right and wrong. America might be crude and unmellowed, but Europe, on the other hand, represented the refracted light of compromise and expediency. Principles were too easily

sacrificed in Europe to convenience. European values, attractive as they might appear in the externals of life, were dangerously allied to moral corruption and were fundamentally hostile to the absolute idealism professed by the American puritan.

This conflict between the two worlds interested James and provided the material for many of his stories. He settled in England in 1875 and preoccupied himself with the impact of the older civilization of Europe on American life. To this period belong his simpler and more popular novels: *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The American* (1877), *The Europeans* (1878), *Daisy Miller* (1879) and the exquisite *Portrait of a Lady* (a development of the story of Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*), which appeared in 1881. *The Portrait of a Lady*, by far the finest of James's early works, is a study of various American characters transplanted into a European environment. Isabel Archer, the heroine, is a delicate child of life, avid to taste all experience. She possesses rare qualities of personality, but is overshadowed by a feeling that she is destined to unhappiness. Her foreboding is realized when she falls under the influence of the slightly sinister Madame Merle, a cosmopolitan American with a "past," and is persuaded to marry the spiteful dilettante Gilbert Osmond. He is only concerned with getting Isabel's fortune into his hands and he ruins her life, robbing her of any prospect of happiness and enjoyment. Although she realizes his vileness, Isabel insists on remaining loyal to him :

> I don't know whether I'm too proud. But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that's decent. I'd much rather die.

The Portrait of a Lady is full of promise, and in its subtlety of characterization and its superb descriptive powers it anticipates the later novels.

James next turned to a more exclusively English world in *The Tragic Muse* (1890), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899), in which he analysed the English character with a subtlety that verges at times on obscurity. James was a prolific writer, and apart from his novels produced over a hundred short stories, some of them as long as modern novels. In addition he wrote several volumes of travel

books and a number of plays. In all James's work there is a strong element of the morality play. The perpetual conflict of good and evil informs *What Maisie Knew*, *The Awkward Age* and *The Bostonians*. The latter, published in 1886, is a study of American personalities and introduces in the character of Olive Chancellor the "emancipated" woman with unsuspected lesbian tendencies.

His greatest contribution to the art of the novel was made, however, in the trilogy which closed his career, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), all of them concerned with his favourite theme of the contrasted American and European character.

On the one side were the Americans, forthright, guided in their actions by moral conscience, intolerant of laxity in others, devoid of understanding and tinged with that austere puritanism at whose chill touch suasion and plausibility fall dishonoured. On the other side were the Europeans, suave, charming, cultured but specious, subtle, corrupt. The struggle that went on between the two sides was not a simple one. The two worlds revolved round each other, drawn by irresistible laws of attraction, yet inherent in them were forces that could only make for mutual destruction. James liked to believe that victory would lie with the righteous. His world represents a definite period in modern history when the first generation of American heiresses began to enter the European market and offered an insidious temptation to old families anxious to buttress their decaying fortunes. Princely titles could be rescued from oblivion and their grand possessors from poverty by a timely alliance with American wealth. But the American girls brought together with their wealth a different set of values ; they were less trammelled by tradition and freer in their human relationships, but they bristled with moral prejudices and puritanical convictions. Sometimes they were worsted in the struggle, like Isabel Archer ; sometimes, like Milly Theale, they triumphed but in death ; sometimes, like Maggie Verver, their success was absolute, although in order to secure her own peace of mind and her husband's fidelity she was forced to see her much-loved father married to her dearest enemy.

These last three novels of Henry James might be described as expanded metaphors. In each the starting-point is not an incident or an action, but a moment of consciousness a

sudden awareness of life, the realization of a fear, the unmistakable knowledge that things are not what they seem. This awareness constituted a complete state of sensibility, and in James's mind it crystallized into an image that became the symbol of his theme. Events develop in accordance with the strictest logic of life, but the apparently patternless flow of existence is arrested within the form of the novel, and the "figure in the carpet" stands revealed.

In the preface James writes : "The idea in *The Wings of the Dove*, reduced to its essence, in that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world; aware, moreover, of the condemnation and passionately desiring to 'put in' before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived" with the result that "our young friend's existence would create rather all round her very much that whirlpool movement of the waters produced by the sinking of a big vessel or the failure of a great business ; when we figure to ourselves the strong narrowing eddies, the immense force of suction, the general engulfment that, for any neighbouring object, makes immersion inevitable." Milly Theale, a wealthy young American girl, is dying, and proximity to death quickens her desire to taste the exciting variety Europe has to offer to her awakened mind. Merton Densher, a journalist of rather easy nature, has met Milly in New York and is reintroduced to her in London. He is secretly engaged to Kate Croy, but they lack the money to marry. Kate suggests that Densher should marry Milly, who in any case will soon die and leave him her fortune. Densher follows Milly to Venice; he perceives that she is attracted to him and that his presence strengthens her pathetic will to live. To reveal to her the equivocal nature of his position would be tantamount to committing murder. Faced with this inner conflict, he does nothing, and Milly is left to learn from the lips of Lord Mark who is in love with her of the engagement of Merton and Kate. Broken in spirit by her discovery of treachery in those she has trusted and loved, she gives up the unequal struggle and dies, leaving her money to Densher. In doing so she awakened his conscience and he gives up the idea of marrying his mistress on the money Milly has left him. Her noble and generous nature

triumphs in death over the world of dubious morality and unscrupulous intrigue.

The Wings of the Dove appeared in 1902, *The Ambassadors* not until 1903, but *The Ambassadors* had been actually written by the summer of 1901, and this reversal of the order of publication was caused by its acceptance for serialization in *The North American Review* (January-December 1903). James had always been uneasy with his age's demand for serialized fiction. But here for once he felt a great stimulus to his ingenuity and he laid out his novel organically in twelve books, each of which could serve for a month's instalment. His subject was well fitted to such treatment, since it consisted in his hero's gradual initiation into a world of new values, and a series of small climaxes could best articulate this hero's successive discoveries.

The Ambassadors depicts, with much humour and delicacy of perception, the reaction of different American types to the European environment. The embryonic idea from which the novel sprang is a remark made by one of them: "I don't regret a single excess of my responsive youth. I only regret in my chilled age, certain occasions and possibilities I didn't embrace." Lambert Strether, a middle-aged American, comes to Europe at the request of Mrs. Newsome, a widow of overpowering virtue and perfection, to rescue her son Chad, who is living in Paris and reported to have become entangled with a wicked woman, the Comtesse de Vionnet. Guileless, puritanical Strether had been prejudiced all his life on the subject of Europeans, condemning them and their ways without personal knowledge.

> He had come to Europe with a view that might have been figured in a clear green liquid, say, in a neat glass phial, and the liquid, once poured into the open cup of appreciation, once exposed to the action of another air, had begun to turn from green to red or whatever, and might for all he knew be on its way to purple, to black, to yellow.

Instead of sternly rebuking Chad, Strether succumbs to all the fascination of the old world and finds excuses for him. He begins to see life from another angle and realizes that he has missed experiences that can only be enjoyed by accepting life unconditionally. He deserts to the side of Chad and the

bewitching Comtesse de Vionnet. Mrs. Newsome sends out another "ambassador" in the person of her daughter, the formidable philistine Sarah Pocock, who resists temptation—it is doubtful if it is even temptation to her—and orders the culprits to return. Strether goes back to America out of a sense of duty, but he insists that Chad has a "moral obligation" to stay behind and remain true to his mistress.

The last of the major novels, *The Golden Bowl*, would be a rare achievement in any language, representing as it does the perfect realization of an idea in a literary form.

> We see very few persons in *The Golden Bowl*, but the scheme of the book, to make up for that, is that we shall really see about as much of them as a coherent literary form permits. That was my problem, so to speak, my *gageure*—to play the small handful of values really for all they were worth—and to work my system, my particular propriety of appeal, particular degree of pressure on the spring of interest, for all that his specific ingenuity itself might be.

Outwardly there is less action in *The Golden Bowl* than in any other of James's books. Almost nothing can be said to "happen." He has chosen for his setting a "certain calm spot where cultivated ladies and gentlemen live on independent incomes lives of incredible grace and dignity." All the issues involved are exceedingly delicate, for the decorum of appearances must at all costs be preserved and never for one moment can the violence implicit in the situation be externalized.

Maggie Verver, the innocent daughter of an American millionaire, marries Prince Amerigo, a cultivated European whose moral judgments are subtly controlled by factors of which Maggie would have no appreciation. He is in love with Charlotte Stant, but lack of means prevents his marrying her. The Prince is constantly haunted by the fear that unconsciously he may offend against his wife's standards. For a time they live in happiness and splendour, until a tremor shakes the sidereal calm of their existence when Amerigo suddenly realizes that his wife suspects his relationship with Charlotte, who has been his mistress before his marriage, but he cannot learn how much she knows. Mrs. Assignham, who has been responsible for bringing the Prince and Maggie together is

fully cognizant of the relationship, but counts on the moral delicacy of all concerned to keep the knowledge of it from Maggie. The "image" of the marriage lies in the symbolic golden bowl, a lovely thing of crystal gilt but concealing a flaw which negates its value. The Prince and Charlotte on the eve of his marriage inspect the bowl, which Charlotte wishes to give to Maggie as a present; he discerns the flaw and the purchase is not made. By the merest chance some years later Maggie discovers the bowl in an antique shop in Bloomsbury and buys it, and it becomes the means by which the truth about Charlotte and the Prince is disclosed. From then on she knows she must defeat Charlotte, but without disturbing the peace, and especially that of her father. She realizes that her marriage, however successful it may appear outwardly, is marred by the suspected hidden impurity. The bowl is the means of bringing to a focal point the varying and diverging complexities in the human relationship of the four chief actors in the drama. The two long chapters which lead up to and away from Mrs. Assingham's dashing the bowl to the floor form not only the climax but the most dramatic moment of the novel. Incidentally, for subtlety of psychological perception and skill in communicating the underlying tension in a human situation, these two chapters are unsurpassed in modern fiction. Only when the bowl is broken and Charlotte, married to Mr. Verver, safely on her way to America is the integrity of the marriage, that has never been openly questioned, restored.

The almost incredible subtlety of *The Golden bowl* lies in its style. An ordered vision of life is presented in terms of a silken gossamer web of impressions constantly being enlarged as the characters unfold their relationships to one another and to the fundamental moral situation. There is no obvious violence, no open rupture, no recrimination, but everything that goes on behind the polished screen of apparently frank and affectionate intercourse is delicately conveyed. James's supreme concern is for the "horror of the things hideously *behind* so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness." It is as if a tremendous seismic disturbance had taken place deep down under calm waters and only the slight tremor on the surface indicated the hidden presence of disorder. Nothing is stated, everything is suggested. Every sentence, every glance, every interior

monologue is pregnant with consciousness. The writing—the images, the nuances and subtleties, the parentheses, afterthoughts and qualifications, the hints and hesitations, indirections and innuendoes all pursue the devious and haphazard developments of the drama of life itself. Metaphors and images, often of poetic intensity, flash and sparkle and interweave a prose of patterned loveliness. Yet in spite of the long cadenced sentences, faultless choice of words and expression, there is no stiffness or literary pedantry. This is explained by James's skill in handling vivid colloquialisms.

A scrupulous concern for style led him to rewrite his novels for the collected edition which was brought out in 1905. When the war broke out in 1914 James was at work on *The Ivory Tower*, but the plunge of civilization into the abyss of blood and darkness sickened him and the work was never finished, although what we have suggests that it might have been his masterpiece.

Criticism is often levelled against James on account of his strictly limited, romantically artificial world. It is true that he was only interested in highly complex, self-conscious people. His continual search for the recondite involved the absence of any direct dealing with the elemental. His novels are often charged with passion, but it remains cold and latent and is never allowed to take fire and start a conflagration. The passions themselves are perforce minimized from being treated in their differentiation rather than in their universality. Characters betray moral good taste or bad taste but rarely passionate conviction ; everything is resolved in terms of "conduct" ; judgments depend on the careful scrutinizing of motives. James's appeal can never be wide ; his world is too restricted, his realism too selective ; he demands too great a power of concentration on the part of the reader ; his dialogue is often so nebulous and allusive that a sustained effort is required to follow it. Yet once his spell has been felt it is difficult to be moderate in his praise. His major novels are feasts for the connoisseur of fiction and as such are assured of immortality.

A writer with close affinities with Conrad and James and who anticipates both Ivy Compton-Burnett and Graham Greene was Ford Maddox Ford (1873-1939). Novelist, essayist, editor of the *English Review* Ford knew Hardy, collaborated with Conrad, had some of his own work published in *Blast*

and was responsible for publishing early works of Hemingway, E. E. Cummings and Gertrude Stein.

Ford's best work as a novelist is, perhaps, to be found in *The Good Soldier* (1915) and in the Tietgens series : *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Upon* (1926) and *The Last Post* (1928). Published together with the symbolic title *Parade's End* (1950) the Tietgens novels have for subject-matter World War I, the war, that according to Ford, helped to bring about the disintegration of Imperial Britain. Liberal humanism and a century of peace had left the country unprepared psychologically for the brutal horror and sheer demoralization that characterized trench warfare. Through his characters and their involvement in the struggle the destruction of a great nation and a great civilization is subtly depicted.

The Good Soldier, once described as the best French novel in the English language, is a good novel that just misses being a great one. Edward Ashburnham, the hero of the story, is the last of a long line of soldiers and gentlemen of honor who is ruined and driven to suicide by the women who try to possess him : his Catholic wife, Leonora ; his ward, Nancy Rufford, whom he loves but cannot marry ; his mistress, Florence Dowell, wife of his friend. "Edward was the normal man but there was too much of the setimentalist about him and society does not need too many sentimentalists. Nancy was a splendid creature but she had about her a touch of madness. Society does not need individuals with touches of madness about them. So Edward and Nancy found themselves steam-rolled out. Leonora survives, the perfect type, married to a man who is rather like a rabbit."

In *The Good Soldier*, life is lived forward but understood backward as the narrator, Dowell, a wealthy American with little knowledge of life tells his story. The first chapters have the confusion and breathless rush of a personal confession as Dowell's mind focusses on what was formerly ignored but in the light of events is now realized in its full significance. He has learnt that his wife, Florence, whom he always believed to be an invalid, "a heart case," has, in fact, been betraying him with Edward Ashburnham and with the full cognizance of Leonora, Edward's wife. The discovery that Edward's real love is Nancy Rufford causes Florence to kill herself. Later in the book when Dowell, no longer emotionally involved, tells the

story of Edward and Nancy the narrative slows down and the line is more deliberately controlled.

Ford is drawn to "the black and merciless things that lie behind the well-maintained facade of conventional relationships and the traditions of good society." Like Compton-Burnett he makes effective use of dramatic disclosures, illicit sexual passions, suicide, madness to illustrate the forces at work behind the "queer, shifting things in human nature." His psychological observations are acute and disturbing; the tragedy lies in the lies and deceits that destroy life and paralyze the will. Edward's tortured remorse and the ruthless efforts of his wife to make him live by her code and who finally drives him to commit suicide invites comparison with Graham Greene's study of the "Catholic complex" in *The Heart of the Matter.*

Despite its many excellences, the choice of Dowell as narrator, the "turn-shift" technique, the flashes of insight there is a certain hollowness in the book. Edward and Nancy are both seen from the outside and the self-revelations that alone would explain her cruelty and justify his suicide are nowhere effectively communicated. This perhaps is the essential difference between a good novel and the masterpieces of James and Conrad to which *The Good Soldier* is so nearly allied.

CHAPTER 10

Aesthetes and Social Realists

IN THE eighteen nineties the English novel, which had already gained considerably from the interest in form shown by Henry James, and the interest in psychology, especially of unconscious motives, shown by Samuel Butler, was for a time affected by the "aesthetic movement." Although this movement had no permanent effect on fiction it was responsible for one or two minor masterpieces.

The English, unlike the French, rarely cohere into clearly defined groups and the so-called decadence of the *fin de siècle* is diffused in the very atmosphere of the period rather than concentrated in literary schools. The only unity that can be found in the movement is of a psychological order. The aesthetic movement was inaugurated by Ruskin as a protest against the indifference of industrialized Victorian England to art and the beautiful. With Ruskin the worship of beauty had been a religion. As such it fitted in easily with the demands of the moral and social ideals with which the Victorian age never ceased to be deeply imbued.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood adopted sentimental archaisms, and, in spite of the pious and medieval colour which their imaginations assumed, they made room for sensuousness by the side of enthusiasm. Swinburne, who felt their influence, glorified the beautiful with a reckless and blasphemous ardour. Through him and through other channels the French doctrine of art for art's sake crept into England.

Walter Pater, the shy, austere Oxford don, came to be regarded as the high priest of the aesthetic movement. He was an ascetic hedonist who in his writings concerned himself with cultivating an intense appreciation of the past, especially through its art. The secret of happiness he maintained lay not in earnest endeavour and action but in heightened awareness—"to burn always with a hard gem-like flame, to maintain ecstasy was success in life." The result of this absorption of all the beauty and wonder the past had to offer found expression in his perfect prose appreciation of the *Mona Lisa*. In Pater the critic as a subjective interpreter achi eves his apotheosis.

Many reasons might be advanced to explain the sudden manifestation of "decadence," marked as it was by irresponsibility, exoticism and craving for excess. It was perhaps *au fond* the outbreak of the impulses which had been repressed by the constraint of the Victorian period: a natural reaction agains tthe top-heavy moral standards of an age which had been stirred by many ferments but had remained unanimous in its exterior observances. At last the individual asserted himself unrestrainedly, indulging in cynicism, in uncompromising intellectuality, in paradox, in every caprice of imagination. Such extreme manifestations of individualism were the outcome of a central revolt against the dictatorial power of a public opinion that had maintained a tyranny for nearly half a century.

At the end of the century, too, England's unrivalled commercial prosperity, her wealth, security and powers produced a bloom on the surface of society; through wealth and leisure a gradual refining process had been at work and now revealed itself in improved taste, in a dissatisfaction with the limits of insularity, a fondness for the exotic and the recherché. In literary and artistic circles there was a conscious worship of beauty. French influences too, particularly those of Verlaine, of Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Flaubert, were welcomed in England.

Society extended a welcome to wit and brilliance and cared little if they were the product of moral decay. Across the channel gifted young men evolved strange theories of art, "beauty is the accidental assembling of an umbrella and sewing machine on an operating table" (Ducasse), and kept impossible pets. George Moore's python, fed on live guinea-pigs, shared the honours with Gérard de Nerval's lobster. Both artists and intellectuals, the latter fortified by the social criticism of Ibsen, now widely known on the continent and in England, were playing the game of *épater le bourgeois* with infinite zest. Not since the days of the French Revolution and the Romantic Revival had the air been so vibrant with exciting ideas, so full of possibilities for living intensely. The English decadents had no literary programme and their movement was short-lived. Already in 1885 a reaction against them set in, but before this happened the movement produced a handful of novels, flawless in style and possessing a strange charm.

Chief among them was Walter Pater's philosophical romance *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Written in a cool, marmoreal prose of quiet beauty, it tells the story of a grave young Roman living in the time of the Antonines. His childhood on his family's Etruscan farm, his education at Pisa, and his maturer years in Rome are all described with a real if somewhat idealized respect for historical exactness. Against this background of the customs and modes of thought of that fortunate period the author traces the reaction of Marius to the various spiritual influences to which he is from time to time subjected. He reads the Golden Book of Apuleius, studies the philosophies of Heraclitus and Aristippus, the stoicism of Marcus Aurelius, he yields to the beauties of the ancient Roman religion and recoils from the horrors of the Roman amphitheatre.

> Those cruel amusements were, certainly, the sin of blindness, of deadness and stupidity, in the age of Marius; and his light had not failed him regarding it. Yes! what was needed was the heart that would make it impossible to witness all this ; and the future would be with the forces that could beget a heart like that. His chosen philosophy had said, Trust the eye ; Strive to be right always in regard to the concrete experience : Beware of falsifying your impressions. And its sanction had at least been effective here in protesting : "This, and this, is what you may not look upon!" Surely evil was a real thing, and the wise man wanting in the sense of it, where, not to have been, by instinctive election, on the right side, was to have failed in life.

Finally the sensitive mind of Marius is deeply impressed by the quiet courage and enthusiasm of the young Christian community, and he meets his death as a result of an act of self-sacrifice undertaken in order to save a Christian friend.

As a writer Pater excels by reason of his style exquisitely refined and polished and his consummate skill shows itself in the power to evoke through the witchcraft of words periods long forgotten.

> The traveller, descending from the slopes of Luna, even as he got his first view of the *Port-of-Venus*, would pause, by the way, to read the face, as it were, of so beautiful a dwelling-place, lying away from the white road; at the point where it began to decline somewhat steeply to the marsh-

land below. The building of pale red and yellow marble, mellowed by age, which he saw beyond the gates, was indeed but the exquisite fragment of a once large and sumptuous villa. Two centuries of the play of the sea wind were in the velvet of the mosses which lay along its in accessible ledges and angles. Here and there the marble plates had slipped from their places, where the delicate weeds had forced their way. The graceful wildness which prevailed in the garden and farm gave place to a singular nicety about the actual habitation, and a still more scrupulous sweetness and order reigned within. The old Roman architects seem to have well understood the decorative value of the floor—the real economy there was, in the production of rich interior effect, of a somewhat lavish expenditure upon the surface they trod on. The pavement of the hall had lost something of its evenness; but, though a little rough to the foot, polished and cared for like a piece of silver, looked, as mosaic-work is apt to do, its best in old age. Most noticeable among the ancestral masks, each in its little cedar chest below the cornice, was that of the wasteful but elegant Marcellus, with the quaint resemblance in its yellow waxen features to Marius, just then so full of animations and country colour. A chamber, curved ingeniously into oval form, which he had added to the mansion, still contained his collection of works of art; above all, that head of Medusa, for which the villa was famous. The spoilers of one of the old Greek towns on the coast had flung away or lost the thing, as it seemed, in some rapid flight across the river below, from the sands of which it was drawn up in a fisherman's net, with the fine golden *laminae* still clinging here and there to the bronze. It was Marcellus also had contrived the prospect-tower of two storeys with the white pigeon-house above, so characteristic of the place. The little glazed windows in the uppermost chamber framed each its dainty landscape—the pallid crags of Carrara, like wildly twisted snow-drifts above the purple heath; the distant harbour with its freight of white marble going to sea; the lighthouse temple of *Venus Speciosa* on its headland, amid the long-drawn curves of white breakers. Even on summer nights the air there had always a motion in it, and drove the scent of the new-mown hay along all the passages of the house.

Marius the Epicurean is an artistically faultless expression of the noble philosophy of a dying culture.

Many years later *Marius the Epicurean* inspired George Moore to write *The Brook Kerith* and *Heloise and Abelard*.

Oscar Wilde, the disciple of Pater, gave a wider currency to aestheticism while carrying it to extravagant lengths and

accompanying it by affectations of speech, manner and eccentricity of dress. It was Wilde's efforts which were partly responsible for bringing about a reaction against aestheticism.

Born in 1854, Wilde was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and at Magdalen College, Oxford.

He put the case for aestheticism with characteristic overstatement in his paradoxical essay *The Critic as Artist*, in which he declares :

> . . . great works of art are living things—are, in fact the only things that live. So much, indeed, will he (the ideal critic) feel this that I am certain that as civilization progresses and becomes more highly organized, the elect spirits will grow less interested in actual life and *will seek to gain their impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched*. Life is terribly deficient in form.

And later in the same essay :

> Don't let us go to Life for our fulfilment or our experience. it is a thing narrowed by circumstances incoherent in utterance, and without that fine correspondence of form and spirit which is the only thing that can satisfy the artistic temperament. . . . It is through Art and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection ; through Art and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence.

The two basic principles of the Wildean aesthetic creed were Art for Art's sake and "all art is immoral." His breviary was Huysmans' famous study of the decadent aesthete Des Esseintes in *A Rebours*.

> It was the strangest book that he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed. The style in which it was written was the curiously jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolistes*. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in terms of mystical philosophy. It

was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain.

In 1891 Huysmans gave to the world his strange novel *Là Bas*. The chief character, Durtal, is modelled on Huysmans himself, and the picture is presented, horrifying in its detail, of the occult underworld of Paris. *Là Bas* is the classic of Satanism. Durtal the hero dallies on one hand with religious mysticism and on the other dips into medieval and modern diabolism, to stir up the dregs of exhausted sensuality. The elaborate descriptions of religious art and vestments and ritual music and architecture fascinated Wilde. This study of a nature struggling desperately in the sensual bog, but gradually surrendering to religious influences, is a good example of the French naturalistic method which was to have a considerable influence on the English novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), inspired by Huysmans, is a variant of Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*, the story of a portrait growing old and hideous, while the sinister voluptuary it represents preserved his youthful beauty. With all its faults—and compared with Pater's the style is a little too rouged and bedizened—the much-maligned book is not without charm. The language is of a studied richness and often achieves effects of voluptuous beauty, especially in descriptions. Dorian Gray and his mentor Lord Henry distil the fine essence of aestheticism in their epigrammatic conversations. But Wilde had perceived the worm in the bud—that the rich soil from which this enchanting doctrinaire sprang was infected. Dorian—for ever criously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, in love with art and completely cold to genuine feeling—was, in spite of his wit, his charm and his vocabulary, an evil thing. The novel remains an unconsciously severe comment on Wilde's own theory of life, the pursuit of sensual and intellectual delight with no acceptance of moral responsibility. Wilde was at heart something of a puritan, but the Victorians, having cast him for the *avocatus diaboli*, refused to listen to what he said.

A fine stylist of the *fin de siècle* who wrote a handful of excellent novels was Robert Louis Stevenson, the friend of Henry James. Born in 1850 and educated at Edinburgh University, Stevenson studied Law, but an affection of the

lungs forced him to make frequent journeys in search of health. His experiences provided him with a rich store of material for his travel books, *An Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*. In 1888 Stevenson set out for the South Seas and settled in Samoa, where he temporarily recovered his health. But the respite did not last long and in 1894 he died suddenly from rupture of a blood-vessel in the brain.

Stevenson was a master phrase-maker whose prose has the delicacy and sheen of finely wrought silver. He was the true herald of the return to literary style. He never wrote a careless phrase. *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* were originally written for a boys' paper and might have been flung off without the least regard for literary grace. Yet they are written with all that sensitive feeling for rhythm and that savour of the right word which marked his finest work in the essays and the travel books. In these blood-curdling tales of adventure he restored to literature a story material that had been long worked only by crude writers for young uncritical readers. He was very much alive to the responsibilities of writers: "We have it in our power to do great harm or great good."

Stevenson owed his fame to the adventure story he published in 1883, *Treasure Island*, a story of piracy and concealed treasure set in the middle of the eighteenth century. The characters are nearly all of them sinister. Pew, the blind beggar, Black Tom and Long John Silver are a villainous trio strongly individualized, and they shed an atmosphere of malignancy and terror over the book. Their story is told by Jim Hawkins, son of an innkeeper in the West Country, who defeats their attempt to steal a map and wrongfully gain possession of buried treasure. The book abounds in thrilling fights and adventures.

In *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Catriona* (1892) Stevenson followed in the footsteps of Sir Walter Scott and wrote romances of the Western Highlands in the stormy period following the '45. As pure romances full of strenuous encounters, hairbreadth escapes occurring on almost every page, these two rival *Treasure Island*, while *Catriona* revealed his ability to draw feminine characters, a skill the critics had hitherto denied him.

At the time of his death Stevenson was writing a novel *Weir of Hermiston* that suggests he was about to create his

masterpiece. What remains is an impressive torso of a tragedy in a study of the deep antipathy between father and son. Lord Hermiston, the Lord Justice Clerk, is a formidable "hanging judge" grim and stern, wielding the terrors of the law with a fierce enjoyment of his office. His only son Archie represents the dawn of a new age of reason and mercy and is revolted at the cruel delight with which his father hounds some wretched criminal to death at a trial. But the love of Archie for Christina, the lovely young sister of the "Black Elliots," results in the stirring up of a feud, and a quarrel that ends in a death. Archie is brought before his own father for trial; and later rescued by the Elliots, famed for the hunting down of their father's murderers, makes his way to America with Christina. The ordeal of taking part in the trial of his own son is too much for the old judge, who dies of the shock. Stevenson had only begun to develop the pathetic love story of the son when the pen dropped from his hand. The fragment does little more than set the scenes and presents the chief characters, but it includes some of Stevenson's finest work. The novel sketches a remarkable group of tragic personalities, hard, strong-natured Scots folk. Old Edinburgh and the dim heather-covered moorlands haunted by memories of the martyred Cameronians form the austere background.

A scrupulous concern with style and naturalism in presentation characterizes the Irish novelist George Moore, one of the many *enfants terribles* produced by the *fin-de-siècle* convulsion. Moore has been sufficiently eloquent on himself in the autobiographical studies, *The Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), *Memoirs of My Dead Life* (1906), *Hail and Farewell* (*Ave*, 1911 ; *Salve*, 1912 ; *Vale*, 1914)—all amusing and arrogant and distinguished by literary egotism. He was born in Ireland in 1852 and brought up in the atmosphere of racing stables and stud farms, an atmosphere that he was to use with great effect in *Esther Waters*.

He went to Paris to study art, and although he never became a painter he acquired a technical vocabulary and an attitude to literary art that was determined by his knowledge of painting namely a respect for formal qualities. In Paris he frequented the Nouvelles Athénes, where he listened to poets and artists, to Manet and Monet, to Theodore de Banville and the de Goncourts, personalities who set him tingling with a desire to imitate and rival.

He read modern French authors, Balzac, Flaubert and the much-discussed Zola, the principal figure in the French school of naturalistic fiction. The French naturalists strove to achieve a strict objectivity excluding any other interest than that of the reality of the work itself. Moore maintained that "the novel if it be anything is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of the social surroundings of the age in which we live," a doctrine for which he found ample support in Zola's principal work, the *Rougon-Macquart* series, which displayed the whole panorama of nineteenth-century French life, presenting vice and crime with faithful minuteness and focusing attention mainly on the more animal aspects of human nature.

A constant regard for form characterizes Moore's approach to fiction. "Art as I understand it is a rhythmical sequence of events described with rhythmical sequence of phrase." The novel must be built up formally, character must follow its own melodic line; experiences and emotions must be selected not only in accordance with strict psychological probity but with an eye to formal grouping and light and shade. The novelist was simply the craftsman who used human material. Relative moral values of right and wrong were not his concern, only his material which was good or less good. Unhappily Moore absorbed from his French contemporaries the dismal doctrine that life is most real at the lowest level where agony is too great for pretence. This idea led to the creation of a series of novels in which the conception of realism was narrowed until it applied only to what was sordid and horrible. A perverse doctrine, as if joy and beauty were somehow less real than pain and ugliness.

During his stay in Paris Moore had absorbed French influences so thoroughly that he came to regard the English language as coarse and rough, inferior to the French and incapable of fine cadences. Once back in England, however, he started to slough off his French skin as a prelude to becoming a writer.

> Flaubert had astonished me with the wonderful delicacy and subtlety of his workmanship, Goncourt's brilliant adjectival effects had captivated me for a time, but all these impulses were crumbling into dust, these aspirations were etiolated, sickly as faces grown old in gaslight !

Then he read Pater :

> Suddenly a new dawn was in my brain, fresh and fair, full of incense, full of wide temples, studious hours, the lurking fragrance of incense ; that such a vision of life was possible I had no suspicion.

Moore described *Marius the Epicurean* as the first book in English that gave him any pleasure in the language itself. "Marius was the stepping-stone that carried me across the Channel into the genius of my own language."

It was, however, the French realists rather than the silver-tongued chronicler of ancient Rome who inspired Moore's first novel, *A Modern Lover* (1883), which was described by Arnold Bennett as the "first realistic novel in England." The story is concerned with the career of a bad artist who deserts the moderns because he finds their path too difficult to follow and achieves success through the influence of women. He is actually elected A.R.A. as the result of an intrigue. The book, which was rewritten as *Lewis Seymour and Some Women*, is full of the art talk of the period and reveals the effect on Moore of his studies as an art student.

A Mummer's Wife (1884), his next novel, was an attempt to depict an English Madame Bovary in the wife of a small shopkeeper in the Potteries who runs away with the manager of a travelling company of actors and goes on tour with him. Her jealousy makes her an impossible denizen of his world ; she is dropped from the programme and takes to solitary drinking. Part of the novel is concerned with tracing her degradation.

Esther Waters, which appeared in 1894, is Moore's masterpiece in the genre of naturalistic fiction. This study of a wronged and deserted woman not unnaturally invited comparison with Hardy's *Tess*. But apart from the similarity of theme the two novels have nothing in common. There is no radiance, no magic, no poetry in Moore's study of the religiously minded girl, a Plymouth sister, driven from home into service by a brutal drunken stepfather. No President of the Immortals would have been sufficiently interested in Esther to use her for his sport. Arrayed against the little servant-girl were simply the forces of organized society threatening and crushing the unmarried mother who fought to secure her child's right to live. Moore tells a poignant tale of poverty,

hardship and humiliation; vivid descriptions are given of the lying-in hospital and Esther's experiences as a wet-nurse. Putting himself at the centre of Esther's consciousness, "a girl belonging to the lowest class that can be called a class," Moore observes a fine objectivity in his presentation and mirrors her soul as in a crystal-clear reflector. Descriptions of racing stables and the exciting life that revolves round them, drawn from memories of Moore Hall, Galway, where the author spent his boyhood, give a tang to the book.

The heroine is a brave but pathetic figure dogged by misfortune. But drab and harsh as her life is, she doesn't repine, she accepts her fate; accusing neither God nor society of injustice. It is her lot in life; better, she consoles herself, better than that of her mother, who was tied to a brutal husband, and she must bear it. Although Moore's aesthetic of fiction forbade any attempt to arouse pity for Esther or to attack the inhumanity of social custom, there is a sting in the book that leaves the reader smarting.

A stormy reception awaited the publication of *Esther Waters*. Complaints had already been made to the circulating libraries that neither *A Modern Lover* nor *A Mummer's Wife* was suitable for young girls, and W. H. Smith banned the book until it was released at the instigation of Mr. Gladstone, who approved its morality.

Evelyn Innes (1898) and its sequel *Sister Teresa* (1901) were further studies of the feminine temperament realistically portrayed.

About the turn of the century the Irish literary renascence was flourishing and expatriates were being recalled. Yeats and "A. E." persuaded Moore to go back to Ireland. The result was interesting. Moore's imagination softened and was drawn to the mystical; he learnt to love stories, to look for beauty as well as truth in life, and to take a new interest in religious experience. The upshot of his contact with Ireland was a collection of thirteen stories, *The Untilled Field* (1903). But the "stormy, arrogant petrel" was unfit for a halcyon calm of brotherhood, and merciless satiric studies of the literary Irish found their way into the autobiographical *Hail and Farewell*. At length his somewhat vituperative stay in Ireland came to an end in 1910 and he returned to England. He had discovered a new way of telling stories and he put it to excellent use. With simple direct narrations in vocal

cadences, without comment or explanation, he told stories as simple people might tell them if they had served an exacting apprenticeship to art and the while retained their simplicity.

In this manner he wrote *The Brook Kerith* (1916). Joseph of Arimathea tells the story of Jesus with quiet beauty. Jesus is a Palestine shepherd, a member of the brotherhood of the Essenes, a nature-lover and a pantheist. Listening to John the Baptist, he is carried away by enthusiasm and believes himself to be the promised Messiah, but afterwards grows bitterly remorseful of such presumption. Taken by his enemies the priests, and crucified, he escapes death, is nursed by Joseph, and returns to the brotherhood. Irony flickers across the story when, some years later, the zealot Paul meets Jesus and tries to convert him to the new religion.

Avoiding any suggestion of controversy and dogma, Moore expresses the creed of Jesus in a manner few could resent:

> Rites and observances, all that comes under the name of religion estranges us from God. God is not here, not there, but everywhere ; in the flower and in the star, and in the earth underfoot. He has often been at my elbow, God or this vast Providence that upholds the world ; but shall we gather the universe at will into an image and call it God ? – for by doing this do we not drift back to the starting point of all our misery ? we become again the dupes of illusion and desire.

The Brook Kerith is a rational interpretation of the confused evidence of Christianity presented with artistic simplicity and tenderness. The whole book is pervaded by a profound and beautiful theism.

In *Héloise and Abélard* (1921) Moore told the story of the famous liaison and its sequel with a wealth of detail and in the leisurely manner of the old romances. A work of Art for Art's sake, it is, too, an elaborate "piece of make-believe" full of medieval colour and romantic episodes as well as tedious controversies between the philosophical supporters of Realism and Nominalism. Abelard's "Love is enough" was a congenial starting-point for Moore's sensualist philosophy. *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Aphrodite in Aulis* (1930) are pagan stories retold with great charm and simplicity.

Although Moore is not among the great writers of fiction – his realism was too limited for that – he is distinguished by his artistic integrity, his power to reveal a new kind of beauty in

the most unexpected places, and to discern in the most dismal life an inherent fate that gives it dignity. His autobiographical studies, with their impudent wit and brilliant observations of contemporary life in literary and artistic circles, will ensure him against oblivion.

Before the aesthetic movement died away in England some queer and interesting figures appeared on its fringes. One of them was Ronald Firbank, who wrote in the Wilde tradition. Firbank was an impressionist whose object was to evade formal narrative ; his characters have the iridescent glitter of moral decay and their gossamer talk is compounded of cynical wit and nonsense. He makes a cunning use of dialogue to convey his delicately indelicate humour in a series of brilliant pastiches. Firbank is a literary Beardsley and best remembered for *Caprice* (1917), *Santal* (1921), and *Prancing Nigger* (1925).

Undoubtedly one of the most Bohemian figures in literature of the last decade of the century was Frederick William Rolfe, the self-styled Baron Corvo. He was born in 1860 of a family of piano-makers, but apart from this nothing is known of his childhood. He went to school in Camden Town and subsequently worked as an unattached student at Oxford. In 1886, becoming a convert to Roman Catholicism, he yearned passionately to be ordained a priest and clung tenaciously all his life to the belief that he had a vocation. The Church however, thought otherwise, and after he had spent five months at Oscott Roman Catholic College his superiors found him an unmitigated nuisance and he was discharged. His stormy and terrible career was the direct result of this failure to achieve his heart's desire.

A.J. A. Symons in the *Quest for Corvo* brilliantly reconstructed the life of this erratic, misanthropic and maladjusted near-genius. It is a *fin-de-siècle* story that excels anything in fiction. Rolfe was precocious and exceedingly gifted, but at the same time vain and egotistical; convinced of his artistic ability, he felt equally convinced that the world owed him a living while he developed his talents. Consequently he spent much of his life looking for a Maecenas who would strike off the "shackles of his empty pockets" and remove "the gyves of his exhausted overdraft." He was intensely proud, quarrelsome and arrogant and he cultivated

> his natural faculty for rubbing salt upon his neighbour's rawest and most secret sore, salt in the shape of biting words, satire, sarcasm, corrosive irony, labels which adhered.

His quarrels with publishers and collaborators became a legend and there were few who knew him who did not quail at the sight of his exquisite script on an envelope. He carried on an epistolary warfare in which his missives had a way of beginning "quite cretinous creature" and ending with "bitterest execrations" or more commonly "your faithful enemy." Friendship with him was "a minor experiment in demonology." Many regarded him as a poseur and a parasite, a man with only the vaguest sense of realities.

> "Take him for all in all" said one who knew him, "he was not very human. He was a sort of sub-species. He must have been very tough and elastic or he would have been utterly crushed by the opposition and enmity he met with and did so much to excite."

But Rolfe had some reason to complain at the treatment he received. He knew what it was to starve for months, to be without a change of linen, to be thrown out of lodgings into the street because he could not pay his rent, to live on reluctant charity, to taste the hospitality of the workhouse. Cheated by publishers, betrayed by friends, rejected and humiliated by the Roman Catholic community, there was no misery whose depths he did not at some time or other plumb. It is doubtful if throughout his career—and he was fifty-three when he died – he earned more than one hundred pounds by his pen. Poverty was at the root of most of his troubles and he dreamed continually of a competence that would leave him free to devote himself to writing. When it did come, through the generosity of a benefactor who believed in his genius, it was too late. Suffering and misunderstanding had turned him into a psychopath. Money that earlier would have given him the opportunity to live in quiet dignity was squandered in a few months.

> He, who had starved on three-centesimi rolls, who had implored to be employed as second gondolier, now flaunted himself on the canal with a new boat and (a privilege usually reserved for royalty) four gondoliers. The sails of

his gondola were painted by his own hand; and he dyed his hair (what remained) red. The long days of destitution and unchanged clothes were liberally compensated now, when he became the talk of Venice by his extravagance: it was rumoured that his bedroom was hung with the material of cardinals' robes.

Rolfe's first literary effort, *Stories Toto Told Me* (1898), was a retelling of the Lives of the Saints by a fascinating Sicilian boy. Its bizarre style and quaint originality was praised by the discerning, and more *Toto* stories appeared in 1901 under the title *In His Own Image*. The same year saw the publication of the extraordinary *Chronicles of the House of Borgia*. The book revealed both Rolfe's pedantry and his poetic imagination, his great sympathy for the classical learning of the Italian Renaissance and the boldness of his ingenious historical surmises. It was an essay in a new way of writing history; the style is brilliantly epigrammatic, the vocabulary orchidaceous, full of fancy coinages and strikingly vivid images, the spellings individual, the system of punctuation highly original.

Brilliant and original as these writings were, from the monetary point of view they were complete failures. By 1903 Rolfe had reached the zenith of despair. He lived day and night with the horror of being turned out into the street. Then an event occurred (the death of the Pope) which not only fired the smouldering faggots of his imagination into incandescent flame, but in doing so gave to English literature a unique novel—*Hadrian the Seventh* (1904). Since his conversion Rolfe had remained true to his owns upreme desire to become a priest, and he suspected a conspiracy of stupidity, error and ill-will frustrating him. Now the papacy was vacant, what had been denied him in life could be realized a hundredfold in imagination. Scorned by authority for the humble office of priest, he would show how admirably fitted he would be, as Pope Hadrian VII, to occupy the throne of Christ's vicegerent on earth.

This remarkable novel, simpler in style than anything he had written so far, is a piece of literary exhibitionism representing the fulfilment of a secret wish organized in dramatic form. All Rolfe could never be was projected into the idealized self-portrait of George Arthur Rose, raised to the papacy after living for many years as an excommunicant. The book

fulfilled a dual purpose. It enabled Rolfe in imagination to take an exquisite revenge on all his ecclesiastical enemies, who are mercilessly satirized, and to glorify himself in the person of Hadrian—enlightened, tolerant, urbane, still possessed of a feline wit, and with a strange power of detecting cunning and hypocrisy in the minions of the Church. Rolfe's special knowledge of Church procedure was shown in the chapter describing a Roman Conclave. The new Pope's philosophy is that of the personal rasponsibility of the individual. He proclaims the dogma of equality as scientifically, historically and obviously false and impracticable, a diabolic delusion for the ruin of the soul. He astonishes the world by an Epistle to all Christians, and shows his unworldliness by selling the Vatican treasure for a vast sum, which he gives to the poor. Hadrian's career of spiritual glory is abruptly terminated by the machinations of a repulsive socialist agitator, who, failing in an attempt at blackmail, shoots the Pope as he is returning to the Vatican. His epitaph is one that Rolfe would have chosen for himself : "Pray for the repose of His soul. He was so tired."

Don Tarquinio, A Kataleptic Phantasmatic Romance, published in 1905, is supposed to be the transcription of a sixteenth-century manuscript covering a day of crowded life in the Rome of the Borgias, in which Rolfe has ample opportunity of indulging his macaronic style and revealing his intimate knowledge of history, archaeology and philosophy.

In 1907 Rolfe left England for Italy and remained in Venice until his death in October 1913. During his stay in Venice, in which his life followed its usual stormy and uneasy course, he wrote *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole,* a book "rancid with libel," in which all his friends and enemies past and present are pitilessly lampooned. With perverse and brilliant ingenuity, mingling autobiography and romantic fantasy, he wrote a romance of modern Venice with himself as the hero—the formidable, relentless "idiorhythmically" persistent Nicholas Crabbe, whose feuds with the English colony are the subject of the story.

> Nicholas Crabbe, being Nicholas Crabbe, was as hard as adamant—outside. He tolerated the most fearful revilings, humiliations, losses without turning a hair. He had none. Even his enemies (which means all the men and women with whom he had been intimate) freely admit (in their less

excited moments) that nothing, at any time, ruffled his cruel and pitiless and altogether abominably self-possessed serenity of gait and carriage ; and they account it to him for natural naughtiness. Of course they are imbecile idiots. What is to be expected of a man cased, cap-a-pie, like a crustacean, in hard armour of proof ? Such a one has no means of exhibiting his feelings, excepting with his crookedly-curving, ferociously-snapping claws and (perhaps) with his bleak, rigid, glaring eyes. Crabbe was detested by people who habitually shewed their feelings. He couldn't shew his He never shewed his real ones for that very reason. But boobies thought that he did—thought that his breakable but unbendable shell was his expression, a horrible expression because it gave no information whatever; and then, when (quite unexpectedly) the hitherto stilly-folded claws snatched and pinched and tore and tossed presumption, with a violence sudden and frightful which manifested some appalling sensibility hidden unsuspected within, the said boobies were gravely shocked or displeased and (when clerical) much pained or even deeply grieved. Pained, indeed ! And what about the torments of Crabbe, which no one ever considered because no one ever saw them?

It was inconceivable that *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* should have been published during Rolfe's life, and those who saw it in manuscript, exquisitely inscribed in his elaborate calligraphy, were horrified at the revelations. Derisively ill-disguised names revealed the identity of his victims and neither man nor woman was spared in a book which for sustained vituperation is unparalleled in the history of English literature.

The "corvine" style is unique. Elaborate and overladen, it abounds in new coinages; "contortuplicate," "tolutiloquence," "incoronation," "digladiator," "occession." Delighting in his knowledge of Greek and Latin, he studs his pages with such gems as argute, torose, macilent, pavonine, afrenatem, dicaculous. Tortuously constructed sentences blaze with unexpected images. An impertinent page has the "face of a beautiful white fiend framed in a web of buttercup-coloured hair." Hadrian addresses the cardinals in a "cold white candent voice which was more caustic than silver nitrate and more thrilling than a scream." In the dim light "motionless forms of cardinals curved like frozen crests of waves in white jade and old ivory on a sea of amethyst." On the night of the exposition of great relics in St. Mark's "the tapers and torches

swayed like catenas of myriads of fire-flies in the cavernous gloom." Rolfe achieves the staccato brilliance of his richly incrusted style by a cool intellectual control of his fiery impetuous imagination allied to a poetic sensitiveness to physical impressions.

After the posthumous publication of *Hubert's Arthur* in 1935 there remain for the future two more novels, *Don Renato; or an Ideal Content* and *The One and the Many*. Saved from destruction by nothing short of a miracle, they will undoubtedly help to enhance his reputation.

It was not to be expected that the cult of aestheticism would long be unchallenged. Prolonged purrings about "world weariness," "exquisite passions" and strange "exotic" vices aroused the ire of a young Anglo-Indian—Rudyard Kipling. Born in India in 1865, though educated in England, Kipling seemed to have drawn from the fierce sun, the strange sights, and the alien faith a more intense awareness of his native land. His behaviour in certain difficult experiences of his boyhood proved him to be by temperament a stoic, despising those who whined, and scorning rebellion. Later his truculence and somewhat aggressive masculinity fought on the side of society against those whose immoderate individualism threatened to disrupt it.

Becoming the chief man on the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore, Kipling received a wonderful training for a writer, as he combined the roles of editor and contributor. He developed his style, memorable for its pungency, while he was a young reporter faced with the necessity of making any story interesting to his readers. There are no lapidary phrases, but the language of ordinary men is used by a writer with genius. Kipling's racy jargon of the barrack room caused a sensation when it first appeared in the decade consecrated to Pater and Henry James. George Moore, a critic little given to praise of his contemporaries, paid an unusual tribute to his copious vocabulary :

> Mr. Kipling is a barrack full of oaths and clatter of sabres ; but his language is copious, rich, sonorous . . Others have written more beautifully . . . but who else, except Whitman, has written with the whole language since the Elizabethans ?

Kipling saw life through the eyes of the English soldier serving in India ; he took the measure of the common man, the solider of the pre-conscription army ; he neither patronized him nor pitied him but merely did him an honour no other writer had done by accepting him and expressing his way of life. Anything that deviated from the common man's experience of life was suspect to Kipling. And the reading public, disgusted with what they understood was the Art for Art's sake movement, readily welcomed a writer who was also a man of action. They enjoyed his racy idiom, his sharp factual realism, his cynical appraisement of men and women. and they recognized the soundness of his psychology. They did not cavil at his limitations; they were hardly aware of them.

Kipling's fame rests principally on his short stories and on his verses, but he essayed the novel and secured one notable triumph in *Kim* (1901). Nowhere is Kipling concerned with the heights and depths of human experience; his skill does not lie in the subtle portraiture of individuals and he wisely confined himself to types. His role is that of a writer imbued with nationalism boldly voicing the collective sentiments of a people and asserting the claims of Imperial Britain. He believed that England had a mission to raise civilization to a higher level by example and governance. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this great work of redemption. Personal holiness such as the old Lama displays in *Kim* was a rare and lovely thing, but men had to be governed by sterner laws. Life at any but the noblest level was crude, violent and selfish : the only hope for mankind lay in Order, and the golden rule for the jungle and the world alike was—Obey.

Kim is the story of a young boy who becomes involved in a very special kind of intelligence work in India. Nothing less, in fact, than anticipating the efforts of a dangerous foreign power to disturb the peace of the country. Interwoven with the exciting drama of counter-espionage is a spiritual romance—the quest of man for the *way*, the divinely appointed path to salvation and freedom from the world of illusion, pain and fear. Kim, whose destiny lies on the plane of action, and the old Lama from Tibet, whose enterprises are of the soul, become travelling companions and make their way across the great continent. Unforgettably vivid pictures of native life under the scorching sun, and the hot turmoil of the

Grand Trunk Road, provide a background for the conflict between order and subversion, holiness and greed.

There was no place in Kipling's world for those who paused and reflected on the flow of life through the senses or who retreated to an ivory tower. What was wanted were men of courage and action. Although Kipling is not primarily a novelist his enormous popularity as a writer affected the development of fiction at this time. In discrediting aestheticism, and by his own sturdy sense of reality, he did much to create a taste for the novel of everyday life which emphasized the interest inherent in normal experience. By doing so he gave perhaps undue encouragement to the philistines.

There was a good deal of the philistine in Arnold Bennett, a successful exponent of the documentary school in English fiction. Born in 1867 in Hanley, one of the five Staffordshire pottery towns that he was later to depict in his novels, Bennett spent his childhood in modest surroundings, was educated locally and at London University. His family belonged to the industrial Midlands on the one hand and to agriculture on the other. They were Chapel folk, puritanical in outlook and with a belief in the virtues of toil.

After working for a time in a solicitor's office Bennett became assistant editor and subsequently editor of the periodical *Woman* and from 1900 onwards devoted himself exclusively to writing. Characterized by the sheer hardheadedness of the North, Bennett scorned aestheticism and in fact al literary "poses." He went into the profession as he might have gone into a business—with the deliberate intention of mastering the art of writing literature of every classificati ; fictior in the grand manner; fiction of the melodramatic, more populai order; short stories, critical essays and plays; and in the course of less than twenty years he justified his enterprise by the production of specimens of each which are generally admitted to be excellent of their kind. Only poetry seems to have been excluded from his campaign. The omission is significant.

Bennett wrote for profit, and declared, "I cannot conceive that any author should write for posterity." In consequence of this attitude to writing it was inevitable that much of his work—and he was a prolific author—was mere journalism, slick, efficient and eminently saleable. His fame as a novelist rests chiefly on *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and the Clay-

hanger series, *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessway* (1911), *These Twain* (1916) reprinted as *The Clayhanger Family* (1925). The Five Towns which figure prominently in these works are Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent and Longton, centres for the Staffordshire pottery industry. Against a background often ugly and sordid the lives of his middle-class characters are woven into stories which are presented dispassionately with an absorbed interest in significant detail that makes them monuments of objective realism.

In 1903 Bennett settled in Paris and the outcome of his stay was his masterpiece *The Old Wives' Tale*. Though written near Fontainebleau, and after some years of residence in a foreign country, it is an intensely English book; it gives the taste, the smell, the very feel of life in the Potteries as it was experienced by a particular family living in a particular draper's shop in Bursley, the chief town. There is an impressive interlude in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War.

The long chronicle follows the lives of two sisters, Constance and Sophia Baines, one staid and sensible, the other passionate and imaginative, daughters of a linendraper of Bursley, from their girlhood, through disillusionment and old age, to death. The drab life of the draper's shop, the trivial incidents of everyday existence, the unimportant people, are made interesting by Bennett's grasp of character and his skill in selecting detail. He contended that the foundation of good fiction was character-creating and nothing else, and the success of *The Old Wives' Tale* is due, to a large extent, to his power of drawing "in the round." Constance and Sophia, Samuel Povey and Mrs. Baines are supremely lifelike.

But *The Old Wives' Tale* is more than a chronicle of unexciting lives, it is as well a grim study of what time does to people. The idea of the novel is said to have occurred to Bennett while he was sitting in a Paris restaurant. The waitress, a slim, attractive girl, giggled at the entrance of a fat ageing woman, grotesque and unamiable. In a flash the essential truth of this unexpected encounter burst upon him in an almost Proustian experience of time. Age is in the eye of the beholder.

> There is an extreme pathos in the mere fact that every stout ageing woman was once a young girl with the unique charm of youth in her form and movements and in her

> mind. And the fact that the change from the young girl to the stout ageing woman is made up of a number of infinitesimal changes, each unperceived by her, only intensifies the pathos.

Time is the *leitmotiv* of the novel and it inspires some fine descriptive passages, notably the death of Gerald Scales, and the gradual decline of the two sisters when they are reunited in middle age.

It is obvious that the theme of the *Old Wives' Tale* should invite comparison with Maupassant's *Une Vie* but Bennett deepened his tragedy by having two heroines instead of one. Constance was his original and the flighty impulsive Sophia was added out of bravado. At first Bennett intended Sophia to undergo a complete demoralization after she eloped with Gerald Scales and is deserted by him in Paris; she was to be seduced and abandoned, to triumph for a brief while as a successful courtesan and then fall into utter degradation. But he changed his mind. He may have felt that to inflict such a brutal fate on the heroine would not be popular with his readers. Or, what is more likely, Bennett's close observation of persons taught him that Sophia's strong Northern character would withstand temptation and she would ultimately return to her native land and take up her old way of life as if nothing had happened to disturb the dull routine.

In France Sophia's commercial instinct asserts itself; she takes a boarding-house and during the Siege of Paris manages to make a fortune, but she is not unwilling to go back to Bursley when a happy chance discloses her whereabouts to her sister. Their last days together in the old town is made the occasion for presenting a fine but grim study in inescapable disillusionment. Disillusionment has been the early lot of the flighty and spirited Sophia who fell in love and eloped only to discover that the man she romanticized was a cad, a liar and a cur. More slowly but equally certainly Constance, who accepted a more sober destiny, learns that the son she loves and for whom she has sacrified herself is entirely indifferent to her wishes and happiness. The cry of both sisters is the same: "I do not want to die but I wish I were dead."

Personal experiences and the memories they evoked give the book its solid and monumental realism. As a small boy

Bennett had actually lived in the draper's shop inhabited by the Baines family, he knew every nook and cranny of it, and, to a child, it was eloquent of romance. Detailed observation is effective in helping to create a sense of the passage of time in the novel. Eighty pages with eleven sub-chapters are devoted to the record of three days at the beginning of the story, while the ensuing history of forty-four years require only seven hundred pages, for time moves slowly and deliberately in the spacious days of youth. The narrative is speeded up and concentrated, as the years rush by, so that the reader becomes part of the time theme and registers unconsciously its passage.

Grim realism characterizes all Bennett's stories of the Five Towns. In *Riceyman Steps* (1923) the same naturalistic technique creates an unforgettable picture of the miserly bookseller in Clerkenwell, whose meanness brings himself and his wife to their death-beds within a year of their marriage. Such realism is of the kind that "finding life crude leaves it raw."

Bennett had no illusions about his own value as a writer; he considered himself third-rate judged by the highest standards. His limitations are obvious. Social problems did not interest him, and he rebuked Galsworthy for being obsessed with the conditions of the under-dog. On the other hand, there is no poetry or radiance in Bennett's fiction. He loved ease and fame, he rejoiced in his ability to amass money and live luxuriously in grand hotels—he even wanted to run a grand hotel, and he wrote novels about them. Detesting Puritanism and ignoring metaphysics, he proclaimed himself a materialist with a vague but ineradicable belief in human betterment. Yet as a writer he possessed solid qualities which made him more than a mere journalist; he was an honest craftsman who could present certain aspects of life in England convincingly and with artistic integrity. Two attributes, Bennett said, were indispensable to the creative artist —the sense of beauty and a passionate intensity of vision. It is obvious that by "beauty" and "vision" he does not mean what Meredith, Pater or Henry James would have understood by those terms, although James Joyce might have identified them with his *claritas* and *integritas*.

Arnold Bennett saw beauty and intense drama in the commonplace lives he describes in his novels because he loved

life; every moment of just ordinary everyday life interested him and he never ceased to marvel at its infinite variety. He surveyed the world of men and things around him with a detachment that is neither aloof nor unsympathetic although it is in nowise uncritical. Consequently his works contain some of the most faithful pictures of conditions in the early twentieth century to be found in modern literature. For this alone they deserve to survive.

William Somerset Maugham, a successful dramatist and a noted writer of short stories, revealed himself a master of documentary realism in *Liza of Lambeth* (1904), and *Of Human Bondage* (1915). Sternly suppressing sentimentality, Maugham presented an unvarnished picture of life, laying special emphasis on the forces that make for the frustration of the individual, whether they spring from human passions or are occasioned by the workings of society *Liza of Lambeth*, inspired by Maugham's experiences as a medical student, is a novel of slum life which aroused much controversy at the time of its publication. Twelve months in the life of Liza, a factory girl, are described with hideous realism, the vile language and depravity of the lowest classes being set down with complete objectivity.

The Moon and Sixpence (1919) told the story of Gauguin and his flight from civilization to a tropical island. *Cakes and Ale* (1930) presents a caustic portrait of two authors, one a genial old bohemian who has become famous and the other a novelist who has been commissioned by the celebrity's second wife to write an official biography. She is anxious to provide a reverential idea of him for his admirers. This novel is chiefly distinguished for its clever study of the first wife, a good-natured harlot who runs away.

Maugham's most famous novel, *Of Human Bondage*, owed something to Samuel Butler and Zola. An autobiographical study, it tells the story of a man with "a club foot, a nervous temperament and a morbid lack of belief in himself." Life from his schooldays onwards is a dismal succession of defeats and fresh starts, all of them embittered by his acute sense of his deformity. Worst of all is his infatuation with a stupid, conceited woman who becomes a prostitute. *Of Human Bondage* is a sad grim book in which the working of fate has a menacing inevitability; its sincerity cannot be questioned, but the total effect is undeniably depressing.

Of the many brilliant writers whose work appeared in the intellectual ferment of the 'nineties none enjoyed more popular esteem as a novelist or exercised a greater influence on the ideas of his age than Herbert George Wells—perhaps the first "modern" in English literature. Blind chance seemed to bring Wells to his true vocation. Born in 1866, the son of a small tradesman, he received an elementary school education and became a draper's assistant, and would have remained one but for a lucky accident which gave him time for study. After some experience as a pupil-teacher and a chemist and another brief spell as a draper, he settled down seriously to a pedagogic career. He studied science under Huxley and took a degree in that subject at London University. Again fate intervened; just as he was sensible of making progress in the profession he had chosen, a haemorrhage of the lungs forced him to abandon teaching, and he turned to journalism and other writing.

Classical culture played no part in moulding Wells's mind; its place was taken by biology and applied mechanics. He was the first English novelist to have a predominantly scientific training, and instead of regarding this as a disadvantage he showed himself profoundly antagonistic to the Classics and never lost an opportunity of belittling their importance in the modern world. Classical humanism was to him an exhausted culture which ought to be discarded in favour of science. Biology and World History should take the place of Latin and Greek. Other writers—Dickens and Gissing, for example, who, like Wells, had come from the lower levels of society—accepted the superiority of the social system outside which they had been born. Their ambition was to enter it and enjoy the advantages conferred by its educational standards.

Wells had no respect for accepted conventions and subjected them to a withering scrutiny. Values that were not susceptible of scientific proof he rated as fictitious. Consequently, untouched by sentiment and with no loyalties to the past, he found himself able to reject much that had hitherto been considered as sacred and part of our cultural inheritance.

Wells's novels fall broadly into three divisions. First he wrote the scientific romances; next he essayed the domestic novel with its emphasis on character and humour; and then

as his fame grew the school-teacher in him came to the fore and he produced a series of sociological novels which showed his concern for the fate of what he always insisted on calling *Homo Sapiens*. An extremely prolific writer, it was not rare for two or even three books a year to come from his pen.

As an author of scientific romances he had no equal; they are masterpieces of imaginative power. Projecting himself to a distant standpoint, to the moon, the future, the air, or another planet, he views life on earth from the outside. This cosmic viewpoint enabled Wells to criticize present conditions and at the same time picture all kinds of exciting and terrifying possibilities. Much praise has been given to Wells for his extraordinary ability to glimpse the future, as so many of the scientific visions he had in the eighteen nineties have become commonplaces. But his imagination was essentially earth-bound. Stirred and excited by the scientific discoveries of his time, and possessing an extensive range of concrete perceptions and the ability to grasp technical details, all he did was to extend the limits of the apparently probable. Of the power to envisage different modes of consciousness, to reach out to the mystic octave, he had not a trace.

The first of these scientific romances was *The Time Machine* (1895). The hero invents a "time machine" which enables him to accelerate the time-consciousness and project himself into the future. A grim picture of the earth divided between a master race and their resentful serfs is presented with extraordinary vividness. The Morlocks—a sub-race—live beneath the ground; they are soulless, efficient, technical and responsible for the working of the civilization which is enjoyed by the master race whom idleness and ease has rendered beautiful but effete. Wells achieves some unforgettable effects of horror in his picture of the Morlocks—"their pallid bodies, half-bleached colour of worms preserved in spirit"—and their attempt to destroy what belongs to the upper earth.

His next work, *The War of the Worlds* (1898), originated in a remark by his brother: "How would it be if some creatures of a vastly superior power suddenly came down upon us and behaved like a drunken man-of-war's crew let loose among some gentle savages?" A few days later, while walking upon Horsell Common, Wells suddenly visualized such invaders just arrived in one of those interplanetary cylinders

devised by Jules Verne. He selected Mars as their place of origin as being a planet, like the earth, but older and therefore likely to contain creatures more advanced than man, but inhuman, since the chances were vastly against the evolutionary process having worked the same way in both planets. The novel tells how the Martians, led by wanton malice, attack the earth and by mechanical warfare of a frightful nature and the use of a death-ray spread horror and destruction. They are defeated in the end by their lack of immunity from bacteria and the earth is saved. Devices that seemed utterly fantastic in 1898 are described in the book, which still has the power to thrill.

The Time Machine and *The War of the Worlds* were forerunners of a memorable succession of scientific romances which include *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) and *The Food of the Gods* (1904). Nothing so exciting as these scientific thrillers had yet appeared in fiction, and what was more remarkable was the anticipation in them of various forms of warfare, including the atom bomb.

Wells, however, turned from the writing of fantastic romances to domestic fiction.

He knew life in the London suburbs at first hand and he described it with enthusiasm in *Kipps* (1905), a comedy of class instinct. Kipps is a vulgar but estimable draper's assistant who comes into money and is taken up by cultured people. The description of their desire to refine him and exploit him is neatly satirical, but the best of the humour is expended on Kipps himself, who is immensely relieved when he loses the fortune and subsides into his proper niche.

Tono Bungay (1909) is one of Wells's most remarkable pictures of English society in dissolution in the later nineteenth century, and of the advent of the new rich. In drawing the contrast between the aristocratic world of Bladesover, honourable but defunct, and the new world of the commercial tricksters, vital but dishonest, who pit their wits against it, the novel affords him an opportunity to express himself as a social reformer filled with a keen disgust at the wrongs and muddles of modern life. The patent medicine racket, with its shameless imposition on the credulity of an ignorant public, is satirized in its most blatant form :

> Trade rules the world—wealth rather than trade. The thing was true ; and true, too, was my uncle's proposition that the quickest way to get wealth is to sell the cheapest thing possible in the dearest bottle. He was right, after all, *Pecunia non olet*—a Roman emperor said that. They knew it then; everyone except a few young fools knows it now.

Although *Tono Bungay* is in some ways bitterly satirical the racy, pungent humour and the amusing characterization of George Pondevero's aunt and uncle make the book one of the most entertaining Wells ever wrote.

Ann Veronica (1909) is a full-length study of a modern young woman who "did" and her adventures in London after she has run away from home. It is the first English novel to treat the sex relationship openly and frankly. In *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) the author presents realistic studies of the lower-middle-class life he knew so well and could describe with such tenderness and humour. *The History of Mr. Polly* is probably his best work in this particular genre.

By this time Wells had gained a tremendous reputation, and confidence, born of his steadily increasing success in so many branches of literature, inspired his consideration of some of the great social problems confronting the men of his time. He began a long series of didactic novels that were wholly concerned with the world of ideas. The series includes *The New Machiavelli* (1911), a pamphleteering study of political and sociological creeds in the guise of a biography; *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), a study of people's reactions to the First World War; *The Undying Fire* (1919), an incursion into religion and satiric fantasy; *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (1928) ; and *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* (1930), an attack on capitalism.

Wells believed passionately in civilization, seeing in it the triumph of human reason over the instincts of the blood, but he feared that unless *Homo Sapiens* made some effort to transcend his limitations he was doomed to extinction like so many species in the past had been. Continuous linear progress was a possibility, but only if men would organize and unite. In the wholly congenial role of political prophet and commentator which Wells assumed during the First World War, and continued to play until his death in 1945, he expressed a belief that national sovereignty was an anachronism and

that present systems and institutions were transitory and must give way to a World State controlled from the centre. Urging support for a universal language, he argued that coming developments in transport would ensure the creation of a unitary world. What delayed its coming were prejudices, human passions and human instincts, and he declared that even the latter could be brought under control by reason and scientific education. He had no patience with religious emotion, mysticism or poetry. They were all uncontrollable phenomena, sporadic manifestations that disturbed society and vexed it with dreams and visions; what society needed was not inspiration but card-indexing.

In *The World of William Clissold* (1926), an immense three-decker novel, Wells not only defined at great length his attitude to the intellectual problems of the nineteen twenties, but put it forward as a typical example of the "fiction of the future"—fiction, devoted to discussion of human ideals and progress. Many who could find nothing but confusion and complexity of mind in the post-war world looked to H. G. Wells as a teacher and guide. To others his prolixity was intolerable. An extreme phase of nineteenth-century scientific materialism seemed to work itself out in Wells in a solemn dogmatic assertiveness. Sex relationships fascinated him. In *A Modern Utopia* he toyed with the idea of a biological Samurai; in *In the Days of the Comet* he implied that sexual promiscuity might be an effective way of overcoming jealousy. His views on the subject are given in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), in which his own experiences are analysed and expressed with the frankness that characterizes his novels from *Ann Veronica* to *Babes in the Darkling Wood* (1939). In this last book he conducts two tiresomely repetitive young people through an outline of Wells's ideas of sex, life and politics, and leaves them on the verge of the Second European War.

He never tired of expounding his ideas, and his tremendous literary vitality was shown in the steady outpouring of his pen. Nothing came amiss to his encyclopaedic mind; he wrote with equal facility on applied mechanics, biology, psychology, chemistry; turning to the past, he compiled single-handed *The Outline of History* (1920); peering into the future, he anticipated, long before they materialized, developments in the control of atomic energy. His literary style has energy and

precision of movement, but there is little power of suggestion and the metaphor and images reveal how completely he was saturated in scientific subjects. Rich in acquired knowledge, Wells was lacking, perhaps, in spiritual wisdom, especially that wisdom which perceives man *sub specie aeternitatis* and realizes that all the great movements of life are cyclic, not linear. His nagging impatience with *Homo Sapiens* and his last terrible testimony of despair, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1945), are evidence of his failure to appreciate those profound truths about man which are based on intuitive, not concrete, perceptions. But there was nothing static in Wells. He continually moved on to fresh intellectual positions, and towards the end, like his great contemporary Bernard Shaw, found his respect for religion grow and deepen. The apocalyptic strain of such books as *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) tended, in the light of later developments, to bring him into prominence as a prophet.

Wells was undoubtedly an intelligence rather than a personality ; as a novelist he created character and situations without passion, preferring construction to the flow of life, and his characters had to go his way, not theirs. Apart from his contribution to the spread of scientific knowledge among ordinary men, he will probably be best remembered by posterity for his earlier Dickensian pictures of London suburban life before it tended to uniformity.

In the first decade of the twentieth century certain writers began to become conscious that a phase of society had come to an end. The democratic movement on the Continent, the growth of socialism and the restless stream of ideas poured out in literature for the last thirty years were challenging both the established social order and conventional morality. Everywhere symptoms of change appeared and it was obvious to the sensitive discerning mind that the centre of power was shifting. The upward climb of the bourgeoisie, its long equilibrium and its incipient decline, could now be seen in retrospect. Its apogee had clearly been reached in the cosmopolitan and urbane Edwardian era, but just when it seemed most securely established in wealth and power cracks and rifts began to appear and the magnificent edifice started to crumble.

Marcel Proust in France analysed with extraordinary subtlety the disintegration of the Haute Bourgeoisie in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* and discerned the signs of

dissolution in the perversion of the sex instinct. Thomas Mann in *Buddenbrooks* presented the decline of a solid bourgeois family of merchants in the Hansa town of Lubeck in terms of a theory that an organism becomes diseased when it acquires an appetite for the exotic. Disease and death accompany the strange hypertrophy of the senses that leads Thomas Buddenbrook, in his desire for art and beauty, to marry the lovely red-haired Gerda, a consumptive musician who lives outside the social pattern to which, through the generations, his family have conformed. In England John Galsworthy wrote a group of novels and short stories collectively named *The Forsyte Saga*, concerning the break-up of the great Victorian middle class.

John Galsworthy, born in 1867, educated at Harrow and New College, Oxford, and called to the Bar in 1890, was a typical, cultured Englishman ; well bred, well read, travelled, tolerant—civilized in the truest sense of the word, and in addition he possessed a measure of literary ability. Himself a member of the English upper-middle class, he saw in property the symbol of their power. The Forsyte family are "half England, the better half, the safe half, the three per cent half, the half that counts." His long history of the family covers their rise and decline over a period of seventy years, the purpose of the work being modified to some extent by the great changes that took place in England after the First World War.

The Forsyte family present the corporeal sum of the possessive instinct, the supreme triumph of personal acquisition before wealth passed into the final mammoth stage of monopolistic capitalism—to be superseded by the State, an eventuality no Forsyte could have endured to foresee. Galsworthy, as it were, caught them and their civilization at the peak. "Superior" Dosset Forsyte, who springs from farming stock, makes a fortune through successful building in the mid-Victorian era ; his money, divided among his ten children and well invested, enables them to live in affluence. And at the end of the Victorian age they find themselves enshrined at the top of the ladder, philistine, self-satisfied and self-contained. Interesting only to one another, they yet hold sway in society by reason of their wealth, which silently and ceaselessly accumulates. In themselves they are nothing ; unproductive and uncreative ; no poetic fire emanates from them, nor do they patronize the arts.

If this particular class is fated to follow the Feudal noble, the Elizabethan courtier and the Regency aristocrat into Limbo it has, for a time, been successfully embalmed in *The Forsyte Saga*. Here it can be studied like an exhibit in a national museum. Moreover, by identifying its *raison d'etre* with the sense of property Galsworthy sharpens the satire and points the contrast with a world of spiritual values the first Forsytes invariably ignored.

In the second generation a new phenomenon appears—"rogue" Forsytes : June, with her red hair, her passion for artists (especially unsuccessful ones) and Soames. Soames's story is the central theme of the book and around it revolves in countless epicycles the members of the Forsyte clan, married and unmarried, each admirably individualized by the author, each with his own history, passing and repassing, casting shadows or throwing light on the principal actors. Galsworthy has created a picture of undeniable verisimilitude of what each of the Forsytes does, what he looks like, how he speaks, where he lives ; all the threads are firmly woven into an absorbing narrative that received a wildly enthusiastic welcome as each successive story appeared.

The Victorian era, whose spirit was caught so effectively in the first two books, was succeeded in *To Let* (1922) by the rapid, slangy, slap-dash, irreverent post-war period, but the creator of the rich, solid greybeards of the sluggish "eighties" showed himself quite as much at home with the flighty irresponsibles of the nineteen twenties.

Galsworthy in his preface declares :

> This long tale is no scientific study of the period ; it is rather an intimate incarnation of the disturbances that Beauty effects in the lives of men. The figure of Irene, never present except through the sense of other characters, is a concretion of disturbing beauty impinging on a possessive world.

In *The Man of Property* (1906) and *In Chancery* (1920) Soames Forsyte is a "safe" man, cautious and controlled ; at thirty-five he bids fair to pay more in death duties than any of the others, having something like a genius for business and a real flair for that which is destined to "boom" in art. A dangerous yearning, however, betrays him and finally brings the whole edifice of his life crashing about him. He

deserts property for beauty. At first he is able to reconcile them and propitiates his commercial instincts by buying modern painters whose values are likely to appreciate. But his love for the rare and ethereal leads him to marry—to "buy" would be a more appropriate word – a penniless girl who does not love him. To a Forsyte a wife is only an extension of his property, and Soames, appraising Irene with a connoisseur's eye, congratulates himself on acquiring a collector's piece. His desire for possession drives him to try to bind this transient loveliness to himself, but the attempt fails; he loses her, and with her his peace, his happiness and his security—the desire for her he never loses.

The story of Soames's marriage and its sequel is told in the first trilogy, comprising *The Man of Property* (1906), *In Chancery* (1920) and *To Let* (1922).

The record of the Forsyte family extends over the Victorian period and is resumed in *A Modern Comedy*, which includes the second trilogy concerned with the third generation of Forsytes, *The White Monkey* (1924), *The Silver Spoon* (1926) and *Swan Song* (1928). In these novels, each of which coincided with an important stage in England's post-war development the author depicted a society whose foundations had been shattered by the First World War and left without faith or principles. The only purpose of the young is "to have a good time because we don't believe anything can last." Fleur, Soames's daughter, is at home in this new world, restless, neurotic, unrestrained, socialistic, but Soames is dazed and lost. Loving his daughter without understanding her, Soames becomes in the later books a more sympathetic figure, as if his creator, faced with the consequences that followed the break-up of that old stable world of property he had criticized so sternly, found himself touched with tenderness for the vanished quiet and security it held. Galsworthy, like Soames, was never reconciled to the confusion of the nineteen twenties, although in his own way he had done as much as H. G. Wells to prepare the way for it.

At the end of the series the wheel comes full circle and the third generation of Forsytes return to the land. Holly and Val settle on a farm on the Downs and Jon goes to South Carolina to grow peaches. Soames is killed trying to save his famous art collection from the flames; labour troubles, the General Strike and the "depression" play havoc with Forsyte's

securities; socialism undermines the sacredness of property and the old world is destroyed in the fires of change.

Four interludes, *The Indian Summer of a Forsyte* (1918), *Awakening* (1920), *A Silent Wooing* (1927) and *Passers-By* (1927), two of them exquisite as works of art, hold together the various parts of the *Saga*. Never has the caressing, silvery charm of an Edwardian afternoon been caught with such allure as in *The Indian Summer of a Forsyte*, a gem of urbane and elegant writing.

Primarily *The Forsyte Saga* is a satire. In the opinion of D. H. Lawrence—"The ultimate satire on modern humanity and done from the inside, with really consummate skill and sincere creative passion, something quite new." It gained in mordancy by being written by a man who, by birth and education, belonged to the world he was condemning. Harrow and Oxford had given Galsworthy a fine sense of traditional values, a respect for life and a great refinement of taste. But it did nothing to harden the sensitiveness that made him conscious of suffering and forced him instinctively to take sides with the under-dog.

The Forsyte Saga has not the qualities that make *Buddenbrooks* and *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* great; it is too parochial for comparison with the latter and too lacking in metaphysical interest to stand against the former. But it remains a fine English study of all the divergent interests that made up society at the turn of the century, unified and reduced to a common denominator—the possessive instinct and the attitudes it breeds. A high degree of conscious art is allied to verisimilitude in a satire that inspired a host of imitators but, in England, has not yet been excelled.

The Cult of Sensibility

THE LITERATURE of any period is never so completely self-contained as the literary critic, eager to fit it into neat categories, could wish. There is a constant overlapping of styles and forms and what is rejected as outmoded at the higher creative levels remains often the foundation of the writing of a more popular kind. So that in the experimental era of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf thousands of novels (not all of them unimportant) continued to offer the reader a straightforward narrative, a well-knit plot and recognizable characters. And in the same way, while Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh in their books were satirising traditional moral codes, popular novelists, whose works filled the shelves of the circulating libraries, continued to support the Victorian ethics of Mrs Humphrey Ward. Yet, in spite of these divergencies at different levels the novel does show a certain unity and coherence in its development between 1918 and 1930. The significant writers introduced new ideas into the novel affecting both form and subject-matter and their experiments in technique and their range of interests were reflected to a limited extent in popular fiction.

During this period a profound change took place in the climate of intellectual opinion. The war of 1914—18 acclerated changes that had begun in the Victorian era and the result was a cataclysmic revolution in thought and feeling. Future historians may see in Darwin, Marx and Freud three thinkers who, in the nineteenth century, exercised an influence on ideas comparable to that of Copernicus, Machiavelli and Montaigne in the sixteenth. In both periods a seemingly well-founded and coherent system of thought and belief was disrupted by scientific experiment and political and psychological theories. The effects were far-reaching.

In the sixteenth century the medieval scheme of things, based as it was on Ptolemaic cosmology and the spiritual purpose of Christianity, gave way to individualism and a cosmic theory that denied to man his special place in creation and left him and his planet isolated in space and unrelated to the rest of the universe. Gradually a synthesis was built up on the basis of the new ideas which by the eighteenth

century had gained general acceptance. Fundamental to the new scheme of things was a belief in progress, in the absolute rights of the individual and in the sanctity of human reason— beliefs which would have been anathema in the medieval world. Moreover, an enlightened rational ethic swept traditional superstitions and prejudices before it and promised in the course of time to transform society by the creed of liberal humanism.

By the end of the nineteenth century it seemed as if the new synthesis in human affairs was well established. In the decade preceding the war of 1914 the general mood was one of optimism and confidence in the future. Progress was apparently undeniable in the face of the magnificent achievements of science and a constantly expanding economy that was raising the standard of living throughout the world.

But certain ideas were at work undermining certainty about the future and the outbreak of the war gave them wide currency. Darwinism established scientifically the kinship between man and the brutes; Marx predicted the eventual triumph of the proletariat—a prediction apparently fulfilled in 1918 by the Russian Revolution; while Freud's analysis of the human mind revealed the disturbing power of the instincts. A critic attempting to explain the basic ideas of the twentieth century has pointed out that both Marx and Freud emphasized the importance of the lower. To the one it was the masses and to the other the instincts. In both cases the symbols of the higher—the spirit of the individual, and the traditional hierarchic frame work of society—were regarded as pretences and disguises, simply forms of irrational intimidation. The so-called higher values, aristocracy and reason, which had been the guiding force of liberal humanism were declared to be false and even dangerous. They must be swept away so that the masses, politically, and the instincts, psychologically, could have free play.

The novel in the twentieth century clearly reflects these changes in the fundamental beliefs of the age, and by presenting these ideas in a popular literary form the novelists exercised a very considerable influence on society.

For the first decade after the war of 1914 the novel on the whole followed the rising curve of intellectual confidence and assurance that the age had in the new beliefs. The "new philosophy" strengthened opposition to anything traditional

and gave an extraordinary sense of freedom from restraint. In literature two main tendencies are noticeable—one negative, the other positive. Writers in the first group turned to satire and criticised, with complete freedom, standards of conduct and belief still influenced by traditional ways of thinking; those in the second group took advantage of the new freedom to create new forms or became violently self-assertive in their efforts to propagate new creeds to fill the vacuum occasioned by the destruction of the old. Common to both groups was a pagan attitude to life which accorded well with the exuberant individualistic outlook that characterises the major works of this period.

After 1930, as a result of political revolution and economic chaos, there is a sharp reversal of existing trends. The novelists of the 'thirties show a loss of carefree joyousness; they turn away from hedonism and concern with individual values and either interest themselves in religious orthodoxy or mysticism or try to find in Marxism a panacea for the ills that threatened society. It is interesting to observe how the influence of Freud, which is so strong in the 'twenties, gives way to that of Marx, which is far more pronounced in the younger generation of writers in the 'thirties.

The First World War helped to quicken new ideas and hastened the destruction of old ones and it ushered in a period of anarchic individualism which encouraged a cynical attitude to life. Nothing was sacred to a generation which had seen all the cherished ideals of the liberal humanists swept away in a frenzy of blood-lust the very existence of which civilized man had been denying for over a century. The ape and tiger were clearly not dead, and man's much-vaunted reason was perhaps only a rope bridge over an abyss of his violent anarchic impulses.

No mental attitude of the nineteen twenties was so striking as the disillusionment with civilization itself. The novel reveals the contemporary attitude towards bourgeois society in all its aspects. Everything which seemed to provide a basis for established order is attacked—the Public Schools, the Church, the world of politics and business, sex relationships, puritan restraints. Bourgeois society is condemned, too, for its habit of involving humanity in war. The rapturous welcome given to the early works of Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh and Michael Arlen, with their emphasis on sexual freedom and

their derisive mockery of traditional conventions, is revealing

Cynicism about the war proved exceedingly popular, as such novels as *Death of a Hero, Farewell to Arms, Soldier's Pay* and the translation of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front,* to name only the more outstanding, testified. They all expressed a disenchantment with life. The most powerful literary performance came from writers who were consumed with bitter irony, like Huxley and Waugh and Wyndham Lewis, or who were, like Lawrence, engaged in violently asserting the rights of the individual. A prevalent spirit of revolt against existing order created a sense of restlessness in post-war literature ; there was no tranquillity, and much of it was merely destructive, possibly the more sensitive minds of writers were affected by some tremendous upheaval affecting the whole of mankind and presaging a complete revolution in the values that may take hundreds of years to work out. But with the exception of D. H. Lawrence, who led the revolt against reason, there is little conscious awareness of this among novelists.

The first phase of exuberant literary egotism ended abruptly in the early 'thirties. Under the compelling menace of the times tempers hardened and the position of the artist in society was radically altered. With a growing army of unemployed in England, with Fascism triumphant in Germany, a civil war brewing in Spain, and the recurrent crises that make the "thirties" seem, in retrospect, like a demoniac ride to the Abyss, the artist no longer seemed so important. Hitherto his personality, flamboyant or misanthropic, had appeared to be the centre of the universe, but from now on literary egotism began to give diminishing returns. Confronted by the spectacle of a society in which he was losing his significance, the artist had little choice. Either he could surrender his personal freedom to the strong tide of political passion and submit his genius to the narrowing dictates of political ideologies, or he could turn away from society and the forces that were shaping contemporary history and seek a purely personal salvation in religion, philosophy or in dreams of uncompromising artistic truth. For the younger generation of novelists absorption into some political creed seemed most natural. But to the older writers who had hitherto enjoyed an absolute freedom such alignments with contemporary policies was distasteful. To them the 'thirties showed

the hollowness of former ideas. Humanism had failed, moral anarchy threatened to destroy civilization and individualism was impotent against the totalitarian state. Hence the increasing distrust of materialism shown in the novels of Huxley, who records with extraordinary fidelity the changing currents of the time, and the search for a religious formula which should give back to the individual his former significance. A marked revival of interest in religion, from the quietism of Eastern philosophy to the active crusading of Christianity, is a significant feature of the literature of the nineteen thirties.

Linking the 'twenties and 'thirties, and apparently undisturbed by the turmoil, were the innovators in literary technique, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson. Creative activity in English literature found its strongest expression in the novel, a form which in England had always been distinguished by lack of exact definition and extreme elasticity. Thus it had been able to draw its material from diverse sources and in the last twenty years had shown a continuous progress in complexity. This last fact, however, threatened the novel as a form of story-telling. Special methods of narration have tended to overlay the interest in the story, and there are few modern novels that grip the reader in the way that Scott, Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot gripped earlier generations. Systematic disorganization of material for more vivid presentation is peculiar to most arts today and may have its origin in collective psychotic disturbances at present unrecognized and unexplored ; but in the novel it has made for a lack of ease in narration.

It now remains to consider in this chapter two main tendencies which affected both subject-matter and method of presentation in modern fiction, namely the revolt against reason associated with D. H. Lawrence in the nineteen twenties and the psychological absorption into the inner consciousness which gave rise to the "stream of consciousness" technique used in its purest form by Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson.

D. H. Lawrence, who led the revolt against reason, was one of the most disputed geniuses of his time. Excessively praised and excessively abused for reasons which had little to do with his literary merits, Lawrence became the spokesman of all who viewed contemporary civilization with discontent. The future may see in him one who, like William Blake in the

eighteenth century, was sensitive to obscure forces that, unknown to man, control the great movements of humanity, and who therefore saw things differently from his contemporaries. In this case it is likely that he may have anticipated the new synthesis between mind and matter, flesh and spirit, male and female, to be achieved by the next phase of civilization. On the other hand, he may come to be seen as the last of the neo-Romantics yearning for contact with the earth and filled with nostalgia for the bright sensory life that urban civilization is steadily destroying.

The philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche enjoyed a meaure of popularity in Lawrence's youth and undoubtedly contributed to his development. These dynamic thinkers strengthened his belief in vitalism and individualism. It is possible, even probable, too, that through his German wife Lawrence was introduced to the romantic metaphysics of Otto Weininger, whose *Sex and Character* is a key book to the thinking of the first decade of the twentieth century. Weininger's interest in the biological, psychological and metaphysical relations between the sexes would have been a heady wine for Lawrence.

But even more important than the intellectual influences in helping us to understand and assess Lawrence is the personal factor. In his case it proved an irritant goading him to express his vision in strange and violent forms.

The son of a poor coalminer, Lawrence suffered from an acute sense of social inferiority which he tried to overcome by violent self-assertiveness and contempt for accepted culture and traditional conventions. His environment as a child and as a young man played an important part in making him what he was. He pursued his own path in life convinced of his rightness, and opposition served only to strengthen his opinions. Especially is this true of his attitude to sex. His parents' marriage had not been a success. The mother, who came of a family with some pretensions to culture and refinement, was attracted to a coalminer of vitality and possessing a full share of earthy gaiety and abounding spirits, but withal rough and uncouth and sullenly resentful of the superior attainments of his wife. Lawrence says of her :

> The pity was she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be ; she would

have him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth.

As Lawrence grew up he was forced to consider the relationship between men and women as a form of conflict, not a natural expression of harmony. Moreover, if we are to believe Lawrence, his mother, disappointed in her husband, turned to her son for the satisfaction and understanding she failed to find in her marriage. The strain that this implied relationship imposed on his adolescent emotions can be seen in his abnormal sensitivity to any threatened domination by women and the almost hysterical violence with which he countered it. In consequence the sex conflict assumed gigantic proportions in his mind and the universalizing tendency so common in egotistical geniuses led him to regard it as the primal sin against natural law. Resentful himself of being absorbed by a woman's tenderness, he thought that the contemporary struggle of women for mastery was responsible for all human unhappiness. He even went so far as to trace the misery occasioned by economic disequilibrium to the violation of male supremacy and sexual harmony. And further, this line of thought led him to glorify the primitive state, which he believed was more securely based on knowledge of the cosmic laws underlying sex relationships.

When Lawrence was a young man the feminist movement was at its height and seemed, by its nagging insistence on the equality and even superiority of women, to be a further denial of the fundamental truth. Again, as a man he had unconsciously identified himself with his father in the struggle between his parents, and his strong emotional tie with his mother aggravated the inner conflict. Even Lawrence's marriage to Frieda Weekley (*nee* Richthofen), a German aristocrat, seemed designed to ensure that he did not escape from sex conflict. Frieda had a strong, even violent, nature and was intensely possessive. Her extraordinary physical vigour attracted and at the same time disturbed the frail consumptive genius who was driven by his own neurotic disposition to seek in her both a mother-substitute and a woman he could dominate. Frieda was neither and their marriage gave Lawrence little peace of mind, although it was an undoubted factor in stimulating his genius to work along original lines.

Among his contemporaries Lawrence stands out as one who lived with a fierce intensity and whose tempestuous passionate nature brooked no external control. Neither conventional education nor traditional beliefs had any power over him, and the spontaneous expression of his genius in his poetry, his short stories and his novels remained unhampered. In this way he resembles William Blake, whose profoundly original genius, misunderstood or ignored in his own time, was never modified by concern for popularity or accepted opinion.

After a brief spell as a clerk in a factory Lawrence went to Nottingham University to prepare himself for a career as a teacher. He did well in his examinations and eventually started to teach in Croydon. But he aroused the interest of a girl—the Miriam of *Sons and Lovers*—who encouraged him to write, sent his poems to periodicals and was ultimately responsible for his meeting with Edward Garnett, which started him on his career as a writer.

His first novel, *The White Peacock*, was published in 1911, the year following his mother's death. The writing, although fresh and spontaneous, is not unusual, and in some respects the novel, which covers a long span in the lives of young people growing up together on the fringes of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, is rather crude. What are beautifully done are the descriptions of nature and farm life, and these are instinct with the power of poetry. It is interesting to note, in view of Lawrence's subsequent preoccupation with the sex theme, his awareness of the social influences that operate to thwart the natural play of instinct and affinity. The hero, who fails to marry the girl who is his natural mate, goes to pieces and eventually declines into sloth and drunkenness.

Sons and Lovers, which followed in 1913, is largely autobiographical. The plot is firmly knit, the characters well drawn and seen from the outside in the round as well as realized emotionally from within. This novel contains some of Lawrence's finest descriptions of life in the mining village in which he was born, and a striking feature is the freshness and delight in nature which everywhere informs the book. Mrs. Morel, a cultivated woman married to a miner, is unhappy and unsatisfied in her marriage. She has married her husband, attracted by his sensual gaiety and vitality, but finds that

the disparity in education and outlook impairs and finally destroys any understanding between them. As her sons grow up she unconsciously tries to draw them into a love relationship, with disastrous effects on them. The subtlety of Lawrence's insight into the psychology of the emotionally possessive mother is nowhere better shown than in his study of the conflict between Miriam and Mrs. Morel for the soul of the younger son, Paul.

When the war broke out Lawrence was rejected for combatant duties on the score of ill-health and in 1916 went to Cornwall with Frieda to try to save something of his creative life from what seemed the wreckage of civilization. But he was made the victim of unintelligent official suspicion because of his German wife and his own rather defiant behaviour. He began to develop a persecution mania and for a time it seemed as if despair would destroy him ; he gave up writing and brooded on the thought of suicide. The sudden ending of the war restored his confidence and filled him with a resolve to give humanity a new faith to replace the old one; in Lawrence's opinion, Christianity was no longer a living religion.

The nightmare years of 1916-18, and the consequent awakening to reality, are described in *Kangaroo* (1921), a novel written after a visit to Australia. The Australian scene is painted with magic and the Australian mentality is well conveyed. But the real theme of the novel is the search for a creed. Lawrence sensed a dark mysterious God hovering behind the human conflict and asserted that the victory would be with those who could seize, and identify themselves with, this master of human destiny.

Meanwhile in 1915 Lawrence published *The Rainbow*, which was, however, withdrawn, exception being taken to some incidents in the book, and republished later in 1926. In this novel Lawrence dealt with conflicts and soul-storms of sex on an almost epic scale. The central figures of the story are the Brangwens, a yeoman family settled for many generations in the valley of the Erewash. Their natures are strong-willed and vigorous, independent and self-assertive. Tom Brangwen marries a Polish woman, a widow with a little daughter Anna. The girl grows up and marries a Will Brangwen, Tom's nephew, and finds complete fulfilment for herself in child-bearing, relinquishing "the adventure to the un-known."

Much of the book is devoted to the attempt of Will and Anna to come to terms with each other, to relate physical love to the complexities of human personality, and to find harmony. In the end Will is drawn into Anna's purely physical world and is content, but the bright hopes of his youth, his ambitions and desires, are narrowed accordingly. Their eldest daughter, Ursula, revolts against her mother's confined existence, limited as it is by child-bearing and the cares of a family. Imaginative and passionate, Ursula seeks a mate through whom she can find a more than animal fulfilment, and to that end she insists on trying to mould life to suit herself. In *The Rainbow* she fails and Lawrence describes with a rare beauty and intensity her tragic love for the Polish aristocrat Skrebensky, who is unworthy of her.

At the end of the book we leave Ursula, who has just received a telegram informing her that her lover has married, awaiting the "man who would come out of Eternity, to which she herself belonged."

The essence of Lawrence as a mythopoeic creative artist is contained in the last few paragraphs of *The Rainbow*.

> In everything she saw she grasped and groped to find the creation of the living God, instead of the old, hard barren forms of bygone living. Sometimes great terror possessed her. Sometimes she lost touch, she lost her feeling, she could only know the old horror of the husk which bound in her and all mankind. They were all in prison, they were all going mad.
>
> She saw the stiffened bodies of the colliers, which seemed already enclosed in a coffin, she saw their unchanging eyes, the eyes of those who are buried alive: she saw the hard, cutting edges of the new houses, which seemed to spread over the hillside in their insentient triumph, of horrible, amorphous angles and straight lines, the expression of corruption triumphant and unopposed, corruption so pure that it is hard and brittle : she saw the dun atmosphere over the blackened hill opposite, the dark blotches of houses, slate-roofed . . . and she was sick with a nausea so deep that she perished as she sat. And then, in the blowing clouds, she saw a band of faint iridescence colouring in faint colours a portion of the hill. And forgetting, startled, she looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself. In one place it gleamed fiercely, and, her heart anguished with hope, she sought the shadow of iris where the bow should be.

> Steadily the colours gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven. And the rainbow stood on the earth.
>
> She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.

Lawrence was now ready to begin his mission as a prophet of the new order ; to build up the new myth of the blood-consciousness that should save humanity from the sterile waste of spirit in a world bounded by the limiting cerebral reality. Christianity he rejected because it was dualistic and perpetuated the conflict between flesh and spirit, mind and matter. The new faith would be integral, based on the fundamental cosmic harmony between the blood-consciousness of man and nature ; it would be nearer to the centre of creative life than Christianity had been. The Blakean imagination would become active and the world of man would be transformed. Lawrence clearly asserts in *Apocalypse* :

> What man most passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison, not his isolated salvation of his "soul." Man wants his physical fulfilment first and foremost, since now, once and once only, he is in the flesh and potent. For man the vast marvel is to be alive. . . . The magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours, and ours alone, and ours only for a time. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living incarnate cosmos.

Lawrence's gospel of the blood was alarmingly thorough. He wanted to do away with modern civilization, with its cities and its machines, to do away with the centuries-old domination of the cerebral intelligence which ignored the cosmic

mystery of life, to liberate the suppressed instincts and to return to the primitive belief that there was an organic relationship between man and the universe.

These theories, rooted in anti-intellectualism, and the conviction that the solar plexus, not the brain, was the true seat of consciousness, were summarized in three extraordinary books : *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) ; *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1923) ; and *Apocalypse* (1932) ; but they are implicit in all his creative work that follows *The Rainbow*.

Women in Love (1921) is a sequel to *The Rainbow*, in which the lives of Ursula Brangwen and her sister Gudrun are studied in relation to the two men, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, who are attracted to them. Here an attempt is made to express the ideal sexual relationship between man and woman in terms of its opposite Birkin represents Lawrence, an integrated human being who has polarized the two centres of consciousness, the blood and the brain within himself, and is able to live positively and in harmony with Nature. He is the glorified male, the "eternal" male that Ursula has waited for and whom she finally accepts. Intellectually Birkin has established his theory or sexual harmony ; through Ursula he can put it to the test. The sexes must fulfil each other, but so long as woman attempts to dominate, the mystery of life is travestied. Birkin harps on the wastefulness and misery of modern civilization, which has been occasioned because the old male principle of domination has been lost. He believes this could be restored by going back to a life of pure sensation, "mindless, utterly sensual." Unlike Birkin, Gerald Crich is incapable of establishing the deeper harmony in a sex relationship because his approach to life is purely mental. He cannot experience the satisfying fullness of sense life—he must analyse sensations, so he falls a prey to Gudrun, herself the victim of a cerebral analytic attitude to experience. She, in her turn, is fascinated by the cynical intelligence of Loerke, the typically modern artist with his mechanical sensibility and his sterile wit, and through her desire to dominate Gerald she ultimately destroys him.

The style of the book is singularly fluid and unrestrained and often marred by inartistic repetition of words and phrases. Much of the writing is even amateurish by any literary

standard. Some strange compulsion seems to have mastered Lawrence in the writing of what in some respects is a visionary book. The chief characters are not seen from the outside and "in the round" but are realized from within as vortices of electro-magnetic energy alternately attracting and repelling. Never had the obscure antagonism between sexes that has its origin, perhaps, in some unknown, little-understood nerve centres of the body been so vividly described.

Running through the book is a vein of exciting kinaesthetic imagery that can turn the simple gesture of throwing a stone at the moon mirrored in a pond into a cosmic act.

> Rapidly, like white birds, the fires all broken rose across the pound, fleeing in clamorous confusion, battling with the flock of dark waves that were forcing their way in. The furthest waves of light, fleeing out, seemed to be clamouring against the shore for escape, the waves of darkness came in heavily, running under towards the centre. But at the centre, the heart of all, was still a vivid, incandescent quivering of a white moon not quite destroyed, a white body of fire writhing and striving and not even now broken open, not yet violated. It seemed to be drawing itself together with strange, violent pangs, in blind effort. It was getting stronger, it was re-asserting itself, the inviolable moon. And the rays were hastening in in thin lines of light, to return to the strengthened moon, that shook upon the water in triumphant reassumption. . . .
>
> And he was not satisfied. Like a madness, he must go on. He got large stones, and threw them, one after the other, at the white-burning centre of the moon, till there was nothing but a rocking of hollow noise, and a pond surged up, no moon any more, only a few broken flakes tangled and glittering broadcast in the darkness, without aim or meaning, a darkened confusion, like a black and white kaleidoscope tossed at random. The hollow night was rocking and crashing with noise, and from the sluice came sharp, regular flashes of sound. Flakes of light appeared here and there, glittering tormented among the shadows, far off, in strange places; among the dripping shadow of the willow on the island. Birkin stood and listened and was satisfied.

For Lawrence nothing was inanimate; life quivered and surged in everything around him, and throughout the entire creation he sought for signs of the eternal polarities—light and darkness, male and female, love and hate.

The rainbow, which in the earlier novel was the symbol of reviving hope, is paralleled in *Women in Love* by the statue of an African woman, a study in pure sensation, "pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate physical consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual." Lawrence suggests that harmony might be restored to life by accepting the value of the purely physical experience—a value which had been denied during the two thousand years of Christianity.

Aaron's Rod (1922) attempts to complete the experience that underlies *Women in Love* by taking up the problem, unsolved in the earlier novel, of the relations between men. Gerald failed in his struggle with Gudrun because he could not draw upon the strength and solidarity of his friendship with Birkin—he had never fully surrendered himself in that friendship and consequently it had not become significant. In *Aaron's Rod* Sisson (who obviously represents Lawrence himself), a miner with a passion for music, discovers himself through his friendship with Lilly. This novel contains some vivid character drawing and some charming pictures of life in Florence and Sicily.

The theme of wholeness obsessed Lawrence and he expressed his belief that human nature has the power within itself to accomplish its regeneration, but this can only be achieved through an understanding of human relationships and by admitting their pre-mental basis.

Having strengthened his conception of male solidarity in the relationships between Aaron and Lilly, Lawrence tested its power in his next novel *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). This is his most anti-intellectual novel. It glorifies the old primitive religion of Mexico, which has survived in the memories of the inhabitants and awakens to new life when a man arises strong enough to reject the alien gods to lead his people back to their own path. Somewhere, Lawrence believed that at some point in our development we humans had taken a wrong turning and consequently we had tried through the centuries to live according to an unavailing theory —Christianity—which denied the wholeness of man and falsely renounced the primal source of consciousness in nature. The theme of the novel is the revolt of the native population of Mexico in favour of the old Aztec gods, whose cult is revived with ceremonial magic and mythopoeic hymns. A

European woman throws in her lot with two Mexicans, Ramon and Cipriano, leaders of the revolt, and marries one of them. Through her experiences Lawrence defines the role of woman in his new civilization.

The Plumed Serpent showed Lawrence's preoccupation with the great cosmic laws underlying sex relationships to which all other aspects of life are linked. By restoring man's supremacy and in giving woman fulfilment within her own world of physical consciousness he believed the neurotic restlessness of the modern world could be overcome.

Fully convinced that he had found the solution for society's ills, Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), in which the entire social system is made to depend on an integral sex relationship. By the time he wrote it Lawrence was a sick man, irritated and exasperated by the constant misunderstandings his work provoked, and his last full-length novel bears evidence of this in the exaggerated, overstrained style in which much of it is written.

The theme presented is, in a way, allegorical. Chatterley, returning crippled and impotent from the war, symbolizes the degenerate post-war world. Mellors, his gamekeeper, represents the new social stratum that holds within it the possibility of renewed vitality. Mellors is the "natural" man and has affinities with Morel in *Sons and Lovers* and with Birkin in *Women in Love*. Chatterley is the effete, worn-out, overcivilized product of purely mental living. Connie, Lady Chatterley, is the feminine consciouness that must decide between the old social order, devitalized and sterile, and the new, bright with promised life. In the end Connie and Mellors unite in triumph over the forces of convention that threaten them, and the novel ends with the awaited birth of their child. In this book Lawrence returned to his first theme—the natural mating of man and woman which extraneous factors—birth, wealth, culture—frustrated so often and with such tragic effect. In spite of his mother's experience Lawrence, apparently, still believed that marriages in which these factors were ignored could be successful.

Just before the end of his life Lawrence put his theory into an exquisite parable, *The Man Who Died* (1931). This sensitive study possesses a lyric beauty that is enhanced by the cool nervous prose in which the parable describing the union of the two great religions which have divided the

world, Christianity and the mother-cult of Isis, is expressed.

Lawrence was hostile to Christianity because for two thousand years it had glorified the ascetic life and taught that the flesh was unholy. To him flesh and spirit were one and division was evil. In the story Christ does not die upon the cross, but is nursed back to health by a peasant and his wife. During the period in which he sits recuperating in the bright sunshine he realizes that it is not enough to have died for man, that he must live for him, and this new awareness leads him to leave the peasants and make his way to the Temple of Isis. There he encounters Isis, the moon goddess, queen of the dark mysteries of the underworld, the spouse of the sun-god Osiris. The priestess in the temple is an incarnation of the goddess and she brings to the restored Christ an understanding of the vital mystery of life. At last the consummation is complete and the harmony between flesh and spirit is finally achieved.

Lawrence was the only novelist of his time to use the novel for the purpose of re-creating the great myths by which humanity lives, and he did it with a burning intensity and sincerity. His prose style matched his strange vision. Its dark radiance sprang from a poetic fervour that found expression in words and phrases charged with suggestive beauty. Yet the fact that he was attempting to convey a meaning that is only truly explicit in symbols led to an intolerable amount of repetition and diffusiveness. He often seems to be suffocating in his effort to express the visions of his brain. The "personal factor" to which reference has been made, and the absence of any formal literary culture, may have been to blame for the laboured eroticism of the novels. But when all is said there is greatness in him, he is something of an authentic visionary, and the future may be in a better position to interpret his dreams.

Lawrence was no experimenter in technique as Joyce was, but content to use the traditional form and plot although his conception of the dynamics of personality was peculiarly his own.

He proved a dangerously fascinating example for lesser writers to follow. Without his understanding and his genius they simply turned out sex novels by the score and gave an unwholesome and exaggerated importance to the subject.

Far more interesting was Lawrence's effect on John Cowper

Powys, a writer whose mingled Welsh and English ancestry went back to the old kings of ancient Powysland, and who shared Lawrence's interest in the prehistoric Druid culture. Powys wanted to restore the life of the senses and to bring back to the townsman the lost delight in nature. His master was Dostoievski, and he claimed to be primarily a novelist of ideas with a desire to push his philosophy of life-adoration to the uttermost. Richly endowed with sensibility and imagination, Powys added to his appreciation of natural beauty a peculiar feeling for atmosphere, especially the atmosphere of a very distant past. This was more than a purely romantic taste for the picturesque. Atmosphere, Powys believed, was the personality of places, and it was created not in a lifetime but over vast ages by human fears, hatreds, loves, by human cruelty and passion. Strange emanations remained in places where men had lived and willed intensely and continued to exercise powerful influences. At certain centres like Stonehenge, with its Druid cults, within the cyclopian walls and ramparts of neolithic Maiden Çastle, and in sacred Glastonbury, there was a psychic density greater and more disturbing than in areas without a past.

This extraordinary responsiveness to the peculiar qualities of atmosphere gave a strange power to his novels and redeemed the otherwise melodramatic accounts of violence, sadism and perverted impulses. *Wolf Solent* (1927), *The Glastonbury Romance* (1929) and *Maiden Castle* (1931) all contain scenes in which Powys's skill in using the imagination to release the stored-up history that lies in stones, in fields, in woods, in pools and in the works of men is effectively displayed. His descriptions are often more memorable in his novels than his men and women. His weakness lies in his way of expanding the story beyond the limits of its dramatic possibilities, so that an impression is created of nerveless diffusion.

Theodore Francis Powys, his brother, showed far greater sense of form and a more deliberate conscious art in telling a story. His best novel, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (1929), a Bunyanesque allegory, allies a keen racy humour with clever characterization in an imaginative study of good and evil. There is subtlety, too, in T. F. Powys's way of investing the mysterious with a disarming naturalness.

Women writers, who had enjoyed a considerable esteem

since the days of George Eliot, begin to play an important part in the history of fiction in the twentieth century. The shifting of the centre of interest from the outer world to the life of the senses and the inner consciousness gave an enormous impetus to the development of feminine talent, for this was an aspect of experience particularly suitable for women to explore. On the whole, women novelists had been content to follow the masculine lead, merely adding wit, charm and a greater psychological understanding of the emotions. But in the twentieth century they came into their own.

Some of the most sensitive work in contemporary fiction is associated with the names of Rose Macaulay, Compton-Burnett, and Storm Jameson.

Mary Webb, the author of the Shropshire country novels, which include *Gone to Earth* (1917) and *Precious Bane* (1924), followed in the wake of D. H. Lawrence and brought a new understanding to the complex emotional problems of those who live close to the earth.

Each year thousands and thousands of novels were published and traditional methods of telling a story and of developing character had been worked so often that the novel was in danger of becoming an expanding web of echoes. It seemed impossible to say anything new and most popular writers confined their efforts to giving a modern gloss to old themes.

One woman writer, Dorothy Richardson, however, succeeded in carving out a new place for herself in fiction. She was the first exponent in English literature of the "stream of consciousness" technique, which, drawing its philosophical inspiration from Bergson, endeavours to catch the flow of life before it hardens into intellectual concepts and mechanical habits. Like Marcel Proust in France, Dorothy Richardson was concerned primarily with the inner perceptions of her chief character, a woman, who is subtly drawn from the inside. *Pointed Roofs*, published in 1915, is the first of a series of novels subsequently completed and published as *Pilgrimage* (1915-35), the whole forming a mental history of Miriam Henderson, whose impressions, recorded from moment to moment, enable her author to convey the very sense of life. Miriam breaks away from her home in England and starts her adult life as a teacher in a school in Hanover. Her casual relations with her colleagues and the girls there

and her feelings about this strange new world form the subject-matter of the first book. Everything is seen from a delicate point within Miriam's consciousness, alive as it is to all the little nuances of perception a male novelist would ignore as unimportant or never even notice. But these are the things which make up a woman's understanding, they are the stuff of her life.

Further volumes in the series, *Backwater* (1916), *Honeycomb* (1918) and *The Tunnell* (1919), led up to *Deadlock* (1921), in which Miriam falls in love and finds disenchantment in place of promised ecstasy. *Revolving Lights* (1923), *The Trap* (1926) and *Oberland* (1928) present further studies in Miriam's sensuous explorations of the life around her.

Miriam Henderson is the creation of a woman and a unique expression of a feminine consciousness and all that it implies. She represents the feminine essence of human experience; in creating her a new shaft is sunk in fiction into a stratum of experience hitherto unexplored. All Miriam's reactions are instinctive, untouched by abstract ideas or conventional reasoning. She lives from moment to moment finding happiness in the direct awareness of things without any desire to relate them to one another or to bind her perceptions into a philosophy. The things she observes are physical, the way "light moves over a wall, falls on the polished surface of furniture or catches the bright glaze of bric-a-brac; the way the evening shadows drift and linger upon roadways and pavements." We learn to understand the way Miriam feels about things, how they affect her moods; we are drawn imperceptibly into the secret intimacies of her consciousness. Nothing is unimportant. We are even permitted to share her experience of shampooing her hair. Following her own path, Dorothy Richardson came to the same conclusions about life as Lawrence and John Cowper Powys had done, namely that the religions of renunciation were wrong; life was not something to be continually deferred in the interests of some other world, but to be experienced and enjoyed uniquely in an everlasting now.

To many readers the "poetry of the commonplace" in *Pilgrimage* is intolerably boring. Nothing happens in the many volumes that make up this English *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. There are no scintillating displays of wit, no

stimulating satire, nothing but the long-drawn out story of a woman satisfied with the "atmosphere of reality," content to take things as they are and to find happiness within herself and her own quiet enjoyment of being alive and sensitive to the surface of things. Women, if Miriam Henderson is typical, live more exclusively with their senses than men do. They do not feel the same constant need to classify and analyse and understand intellectually what they are experiencing. They plunge, like sensitive filaments, into the stream of life and remain responsive to every ripple and current. To achieve a complete naturalness in this inner world of subjective perception Dorothy Richardson searches as diligently as Henry James for the *mot juste*, and she is often brilliantly successful in creating a vivid and immediate impression of her heroine's sensations.

Yet the question stubbornly persists whether Miriam, with the amoeba-like consciousness, her delvings into the lost continent of feminine susceptibility, shrinking into herself at the first frost of criticism or expanding under kindly influences, is sufficiently interesting to justify so many volumes. Proust, after all, did have the panorama of French society as a background for his egotistic hero.

A far more exciting use of the "stream of consciousness" technique was made by Virginia Woolf, assuredly the most distinguished woman writer of this generation. The daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, a man of letters, philosopher, don and agnostic, she grew up in a world of cultural refinement, the world of art, music and literature. Her schoolroom was her father's library, her teachers his literary friends. Steeped from her earliest years in the English and French classics, Virginia Woolf brought to the novel an unusual elegance of style and a rare poetic sensibility. She read Bergson and learned much from two contemporary experimenters in the art of fiction, Marcel Proust and James Joyce. Proust's conception of personality as a continuous process of decantation from one state to another, interesting only so long as the mystery of the tincture remains unfathomed, affected her own theory of the multiple selves. She read Joyce's *Ulysses* when it appeared in serial form in 1919 and was immediately impressed by the way in which he had found an alternative to the well-made plot and external characterization. His conception of the inner drama of the mind was fraught with

tremendous possibilities. Her poetic feeling for language responded to his prose style with its fluidity and suggestiveness.

Virginia Woolf's purely literary education would have proved a handicap had she attempted to create characters in the traditional manner by building up from the outside. Experience of life came to her filtered through great literature and witty conversation. She never knew life in the raw. Nor was there in her case a "personal factor" to act as an irritant and distort her view of life for creative ends. Her imagination would have been stultified had she attempted to followin the footsteps of H. G, Wells, Arnold Bennett or Galsworthy; their methods would have proved fatal to her special gifts—her poetry and her perceptive power, fine as gossamer. Instead, Virginia Woolf ignored the outer personality, regarding it simply as the "semi-transparent envelope" through which she could study the "reality," namely the thoughts, feelings and impressions as they quickened into life. "It's life that matters, nothing but life, the process of discovering the everlasting and perpetual process." The stuff of life—the thoughts, feelings, impressions—steeped in the richest dyes of her imagination and turned into images by her poetic sensibility, is then depicted in literature with the same vivid immediacy and distinctness as colours are thrown on a screen.

Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, appeared in 1915, the same year as Dorothy Richardson's *Pointed Roofs*. It followed the traditional pattern of story-telling, and the story—of a young and inexperienced girl who comes to learn something of life and the relations between the sexes, falls in love and dies of a tropical fever before she can realize herself—is one that Henry James might have tackled. Rachel Vinrace, on the voyage in her father's boat and staying with her uncle and aunt on their lonely island, is sympathetically drawn. But the real interest in the novel centres on a vague awareness that there is a meaning in life. Somewhere the mystery of life and death is laid bare. Perhaps, Mrs. Woolf suggests, by a patient exploration of certain faintly illumined recesses of consciousness, something might be discovered, perhaps a clue to the ultimate secret might be found.

Virginia Woolf's second novel, *Night and Day*, appeared in 1919. In this long novel influences from Jane Austen and

Meredith are discernible. From Jane Austen comes the fine precision and clear-cut relationships between the characters, from Meredith the flush of poetry. Set in London, in an atmosphere of intellectual discussion, the novel offers an elaborate long-drawn-out study of Katherine Hilberry, an intelligent young woman of the middle class, and her relations with her mother and four friends. The mother and daughter are working together on a biography of the girl's grandfather, a famous scholar whose reputation and personality continues to dominate their lives after his death. At the beginning of the book Katherine is engaged to William Rodney, an elegant precise scholar whom she does not really love; by the end of the story she is, thanks to a series of rather clumsy devices, left free to marry the poor but brilliant lawyer Ralph Denham. The main interest, however, lies not in Jane Austenish variations on a theme of love but on the conversations and introspections in which the chief characters are engaged and which gradually reveal their doubts and hesitations as they encounter the reality of experience. Mrs. Woolf is still clearly in pursuit of that mysterious essence of life that seems to disappear in the process of becoming:

> Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this the essential thing has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide.

The quality of the writing in these early novels possesses a lyrical charm, a certain poetic vibrancy in the choice of words and a quiet evocative beauty.

Jacob's Room (1922) represents her first serious experiment in technique and shows the effect *Ulysses* had had on her. In it an attempt is made to construct pictorially the personality of a young Englishman from his infancy to the age of twenty-six, when he is killed in the war. His experiences are recorded in flashes, discontinuous and fragmentary, in a series of rapidly dissolving impressions which are only kept from complete disintegration by the author, who directs the ebb and flow of life through Jacob's consciousness. So tenuous and insubstantial is the stuff of his experiences that it is hard to say, except in vague and inconsequent terms, what happens to him in the meantime. His childhood, his student days in Cambridge, the women who love him, his love

for the faithless Florinda, the disappointment that turns London into a nightmare of squalor where even the nightingales are obscene and his untimely death in the war—that is all. Jacob's personality is summoned into existence by constant references to the environment it has created. A camera-eye technique is responsible for the vivid and disjointed effects. There are no connecting links; contrasted experiences are juxtaposed in a system of literary Cubism and fragments and glimpses of his life are selected with artistic deliberation and steeped in the dye of intense emotion. Time, frustration and death fling their dark shadows across the sunlit dreams of youth and human faithlessness quenches the fires of love and leaves behind dust and ashes. In *Jacob's Room* Mrs. Woolf's quest for the meaning of human experience goes on, but the mystery remains.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) the personality to be explored and re-created is that of a woman on the threshold of middle age. Incidents of a day in her life and the accompanying visual, mental and emotional impressions are set down from moment to moment in the style of Dorothy Richardson with a touch of Joyce. Mrs. Dalloway, intent on the preparations for her birthday party (she is fifty) in the evening, is outwardly poised and controlled, yet filled with wistful regrets for what time has left unachieved. The day in her life is expressed in terms of a long interior monologue, the smooth-flowing stream of consciousness interrupted only by the striking hours of a clock that poignantly marks the drifting hours.

Few things "happen." An old admirer from India calls and there is an instant of tenderness. Mrs. Dalloway's tranquility is momentarily disturbed by concern for her daughter and the broken-down spinster who is trying to convert her.

An ex-soldier, suffering from the delayed effects ofs hell-shock, commits suicide, and Mrs. Dalloway, hearing of this casually from the doctor who is a guest at her party, experiences a moment of luminous insight into life and death and time. External actions, conclusions and climaxes are discarded and only the sense of movement within the mind is retained.

Somewhere in a character Mrs. Woolf would seem to suggest there exists "reality," which it is the novelist's task to discern. It cannot be built up from without by noting all the facts, by painstakingly recording everything that "happens,"

but only by imaginative insight into the living stream of thoughts that flows through the mind. The debt to Joyce is obvious in the scene where the incongruous multitude of impressions that make up a London street are presented with vivid inconsequence as Mrs. Dalloway goes to the florist's to order flowers for the evening. As she walks along memories from the past float like gossamer threads across the present, flash and quiver for an instant in the stream of consciousness, revive old forgotten pains and regrets, and then dissolve insubstantially in the delicious tranquil haze of the summer afternoon.

Mrs. Dalloway is a study of a certain type of cultured woman absorbed in the contemplation of personal emotions. It might be argued that the organized tenuousness of Virginia Woolf's perceptions denudes the novel of vitality and deprives it of the sustaining sense of life in action, but the drama within the mind, where, after all, action begins, is made as exciting as external events.

To the Lighthouse (1927), perhaps her most successful novel, was yet another experiment towards a new method of re-creating satisfactorily the "reality" inherent in human personality, and the nature of human relationships. The scene is set on an unnamed island in the Hebrides one late September day a few years before the outbreak of the First World War. Mr. Ramsay, a somewhat arid professor of philosophy, is on holiday with his wife and children and some guests. Mrs. Ramsay, a sensitive, suffers from a sense of inadequacy in human relations. She believes there is something beyond the outer factual world, there is "a coherence in things, a stability; something is immune from change, shines out in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby." Among the guests there is an artist, Lily Bristoe, the one human being who has some understanding of the problems in life that confront Mrs. Ramsay. Lily Bristoe's whole life is a quest for a vision of "reality" that she can translate into colour and form, but the vision constantly eludes her attempts to give it final expression. A proposed visit to the Lighthouse fires the imagination of little James Ramsay, who, in his childish enthusiasm, shares something of Lily's visionary insight. But the promised visit does not take place and the Lighthouse itself comes to symbolize in some queer way the "reality" which is never experienced. The family leave the

island, war breaks out, and they are unable to return. In the long years of neglect the house decays and the island itself suffers change. Mrs. Ramsay dies, Andrew Ramsay is killed in the war, Prue dies in childbirth and James's unconscious conflict with his father remains unresolved. At length, ten years later, the remnant of the Ramsay family visit the island again in company with Lily Bristoe, who was their guest on the first occasion. This time James and his father get to the Lighthouse, but those they love are not there to share the experience.

Within this slender framework Virginia Woolf has assembled a strange pattern of symbolic ideas. Little is said; inconsequent streams of thoughts, longings, apprehensions, musings on life pour out as they arise in the minds of all, and take on the colour of beauty, sorrow and mystery as the misty island itself takes on the tints thrown out by invisible Nature. Somewhere the impressions that make up these lives compose part of a "reality," but the ultimate significance of it eludes us, the great revelations are awaited, but they do not come, the visit to the Lighthouse has constantly to be deferred. "Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck in the darkness."

Yet at the end there is a sense of positive achievement. The Lighthouse is visited; Lily Brostoe finishes her picture.

> She looked at the steps; they were empty, she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

Virginia Woolf had found a method, that of symbolism, which enabled her to present the inner world of perceptions and she tried to relate it to a deeper philosophic purpose. But in spite of the scrupulous artistic integrity with which the theme is treated it is hard to escape the feeling that both reader and author have been frustrated. The mystery of existence has not found the significant image which should contain it. Yet the lighthouse is that which emerges out of the sea, out of life, out of time and is eternal. To reach that eternity Mr. Ramsay, the self-contained man, must leave the "island," symbolic of the isolated self and of the reluctance to yield to the sea and become part of it.

Orlando (1928), which followed *To the Lighteouse*, is the liveliest of her works, and might be appropriately described as a biographical extravaganza. Ostensibly it attempts to relate, in a series of vivid scenes and dramatic climaxes, the psychological mental experiences of a poet while writing a prize poem. The poet in question is Victoria Sackville West, a friend of Virginia Woolf, and the poem is *The Land*. But this is made an excuse for a long and exciting excursion into past history on the assumption that in the persons of her ancestors the poet was present when Queen Elizabeth visited Knole – an event that leads to strange experiences. Orlando changes her sex from male to female in the course of the story, a change used not only to symbolize the changing moods of literature, now masculine and heroic, now romantic and feminine, but to enable the author to launch a wittily satirical attack on the way men have pigeon-holed women through the ages.

Some of the descriptions in *Orlando*, notably the account of the great frost in the reign of James the First, are among the finest pieces of writing in modern English literature. While it would be difficult to deduce from the novels that Virginia Woolf is a humorist, *Orlando* is full of gay mocking laughter, lively irony and a brilliance of wit that earns for its author the right to a place on Olympus beside Peacock and Wilde. Never had the Comic Spirit shown such grace, delicacy and good breeding, nor such impish erudition, as in *Orlando*.

Virginia Woolf's masterpiece, *The Waves*, followed in 1931. This work would be an outstanding achievement in any literature for the quality of the writing and the sustained imagery. There is something Byzantine in the style, which, with its jewelled elaborate beauty, has turned a novel into a prose poem. *The Waves* represents an aesthetic initiation of a rare order and is the test of any reader's appreciation of pure literature.

The theme, the waves of experience breaking over a group of characters, offered a further opportunity for experiments in technique. Using the method of interior monologue, the author introduces us into the consciousness of six characters, all subtly differentiated, and observed at various stages as they pass from childhood to maturity and death. There is Bernard, a "extrovert, sociable, malleable, always trying to capture the essence of life in words and phrases"; Neville,

"fastidious, precise, an introvert who shrinks from the proffered intimacies of others"; and Louis, the son of an Australian banker, conscious of inferiority. Brought up with them are three girls—Susan, "passionate and possessive"; Jinny, "impish, wayward and elusive"; and Rhoda, "shy and withdrawn, not fully adapted to life." From their childhood they react to experience individually and throughout their lives they run true to form.

Narrative art in this novel is replaced by lyrical prose sequences which are meant to reveal the infinitely subtle process by which the personality adjusts itself to life.

All the characters are endowed with Mrs. Woolf's own excessive sensibility and the reader is invited to share in the pageant of their inner lives as they pass from half-conscious childhood, when the world is a magical place exciting in its innocent sensuousness, through dreaming youth, with its hopes and ambitions, to maturity, which brings with it a growing awareness of reality, the sense of sorrow and failure and the problem of death until age swallows up all hopes of fulfilment in its engulfing night. The most articulate of her characters, Bernard, is left alone at the end to sum up what has been encountered in the course of life. Stationing herself at the very centre of each character's being, Mrs, Woolf tries to catch the impressions of life as they affect the personality, changing its perspectives and drawing it nearer to the end.

Time, the main theme of *The Waves*, is measured in nine symbolic interludes which mark the sun's progress over the sea from dawn to night. These set pieces of description are often of great beauty. In their hard opalescence the images of the waves resemble coils of frozen spray refracting light. The preludes give to the book a certain masque-like quality, which is further enhanced by the stiff jewelled phrases and poetic images, and the luminous richness of continuous metaphor and image. Here is morning light becoming visible :

> The light struck up on the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then another. One bird chirped high up ; there was a pause ; another chirped lower down. The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a thin blue finger-print of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window. The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside.

Throughout *The Waves* there is the same ceaseless quest as in the other novels for the elusive meaning of life, but towards the end there is a suggestion that this meaning exists, that it is implict in every experience, but it cannot be abstracted by the mind nor can words contain it. Bernard, who only recognizes an experience when he has crystallized it in a phrase, voices his own desire :

> My book stuffed with phrases has dropped to the floor. It lies under the table to be swept up by the charwoman when she comes wearily at dawn looking for straps of paper, old tram tickets, and here and there a note screwed into a ball and left with the litter to be swept up. . . . How much better is silence; the coffee cup, the table. How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here for ever with bare things, this coffee cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself, Do not come and worry me with your hints and that it is time to shut the shop and be gone. I would willingly give all my money that you should not disturb me but let me sit on and on, silent, alone.

His whole life has been spent is trying to imprison reality in words like a fly in amber. He has learnt only that all that is left is the consciousness that

> Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky ; some sort of renewal. ... Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again,

The Years (1937) heralded a return to a simpler form of fiction ; this is a novel of the generations in which the fortunes of a middle-class family from 1880 to the present time are ather sketchily represented.

Mrs. Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), was published posthumously and shows evidence of confusion rare in her work, suggesting that the intellectual control which had hitherto sustained her perceptive vision was breaking down. The action in the story centres on a pageant organized by the village schoolmistress and which takes the form of scenes from the history of England, illustrating "the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again." Mrs. Woolf is clearly preoccupied in *Between the Acts* with the change and diversity that underlie the most stable periods. Time moves in cycles, creating and destroying, an infinitely complicated process that will not yield

its secret but holds the final meaning of life. *Between the Acts* is filled with a sense of her personal failure to wrest a meaning from experience and the despair is deepened by the spectacle of a world at war.

Virginia Woolf's literary reputation may perhaps best be assessed by admitting that by accepted canons of fiction she could not be said to possess the temperament of a novelist at all—she could not "tell a story." Here formula for the novel was not humanity in action but in a state of infinite perception. She never entirely shed the illusion, fostered by her background and her sheltered life among cultured, sensitive people, that all the rest of mankind was equally cultured and intelligent and equally responsive to the "finer vibrations." Caring little for the world of fact, she tended to question its value. She set the quest for truth against the dreary catalogue of outward facts and sought a spiritual certainty behind the manifold experiences of life. To discover it would give her the desired assurance that love, peace and happiness were absolute and eternal.

She was in fact a poet, but apparently she lacked the technical equipment of a verse writer so that she was fated to at least a partial frustration in whatever prose form she adopted. Her work has the form and substance of lyrical poetry. Who but a poet could have written these two extracts from the preludes in *The Waves*? In the first she is describing the sun piercing the waves:

> Their quivering mackerel sparkling was darkened; they massed themselves; their green hollows deepened and darkened and might be traversed by shoals of wandering fish. As they splashed and drew back they left a black rim of twigs and cork on the shore and straws and sticks of wood, as if some light shallop had foundered and burst its sides and the sailor had swum to the land and bounded up the cliff and left his frail cargo to be washed ashore.

And here she is describing the birds responding to the morninglight in a garden:

> Perhaps it was a snail shell, rising in the grass like a grey cathedral, a swelling building burnt with dark rings and shadowed green by the grass. Or perhaps they saw the splendour of the flowers making a light of flowing purple over the beds, through which dark tunnels of purple shade

> were driven between the stalks. Or they fixed their gaze on the small bright apple leaves, dancing yet withheld, stiffly sparkling among the pink-tipped blossoms. Or they saw the rain drop on the hedge, pendent but not falling, with a whole house bent in it, and towering elms; or, gazing straight at the sun, their eyes became gold beads.

But the beauty of renewed light also reveals the obscene horror of death and rotting decay, it touches on the yellow excretions exuded by slugs and lights up the drops formed on the bloated sides of swollen things. Mrs. Woolf notes that beauty itself is linked to decay :

> the gold-eyed birds darting in between the leaves observed that purulence, that wetness, quizzically. Now and then they plunged the tips of their beaks savagely into the sticky mixture.

She was a truly great writer. "Her medium was the written word in the fullness of evocative magic through pattern and colour and harmony. As a writer in this sense her range was unique: she could touch upon every string of sensibility and at times produce a tension that is painful as she stretches beyond the octave to which the common reader is ordinarily responsive. To read her is to have one's capacity for sensation enlarged and sharpened beyond measure."

The future of the novel may depend on its capacity to add a new dimension by absorbing the poetic experience of life and developing a new kind of poetic prose to express it. James Joyce's great experiments in prose certainly point in this direction. Mrs. Woolf was obviously on the threshold of discovery in transferring the drama of life form the outer sphere of action to the mind, where everything has its beginning. The psychological possibilities of this discovery are enormous. Within the pattern of straghtforward narration and the variations upon it there was no vitality, and the dull worthlessness of much fiction cast in the mould is ample proof that genius has rejected it.

Satire and Experiment Between Two Wars

EVEN IN these democratic days it is safe to say that only a few writers in any period are significant. They form the apex, as it were, of a triangle, while the average writers are found in increasing numbers along the sides and the base. At the highest level are those whose original experiments create new forms in literature; whose advocacy of ideas changes the climate of intellectual opinion, or whose passionate beliefs grip the hearts of men and modify sensibility. Such writers seem to possess some imaginative insight or intuition that enables them to sense the approach of a new era and to anticipate its outlook. The majority of twentieth-century novelists, even the best of them, were content to repeat with variations what had already been said of the little state of man —and woman—in previous generations. Admittedly they said it with more freedom and with greater subtlety. They produced works of fiction that were accomplished and popular but lacking in the true creative power. What makes them "modern" is a certain heightened consciousness, an awareness of their own responses, moral and amoral, aesthetic and intellectual, and the way in which they adapt the work of the experimenters so as to give an air of novelty to their own productions without imposing any strain on the reader. But they remain derivative. Against the rare appearance of one genuine creative essay in the art of fiction must be set the average output of ten thousand volumes. In this brief survey of novel the emphasis must inevitably fall on those writers who have made vital contributions to its development.

The novelists whose work is the subject of this chapter are allied in their objectivity and in their respect for their medium as an art form. They are, moreover, all characterized by a predominantly intellectual and critical attitude to life that profoundly affected their contemporaries. There is, perhaps, an excess of sophistication and the imagination is directed towards understanding and formulating the principles of life rather than attempting to seize and render its inner quality.

This is true even of James Joyce, who technically employs the "stream of consciousness" method, and of E. M. Forster, who was on the side of Lawrence in stressing the need to develop the sympathetic heart. Both Joyce and Forster are detached and objective in their treatment of their material. All these writers possess keen intelligence, all are moulded by a common culture, although much of their work is concerned with questioning its value.

The main lines of the satiric attack on society were laid down by Norman Douglas in *South Wind* (1917). Douglas "has no label—at least, not one that stays on"—and his writings cover a formidable range. Critic, traveller, biologist, musician, lingust, archaeologist, mineralogist, hagiographer, there is no subject he touches upon that is not illumined by his brilliant wit. Certain things he dislikes : religion, the English climate and the English way of life, sentimentality and dullness. His attitude is that of a cultured epuicurean who does not think it likely the world will ever be sensibly better than it is now. A sturdy oppcnent of the fallacy of equality, he maintained that differences of quality are inherent in the nature of man when he is born and that the only effect of widespread philanthropy was to lower the quality of life by prompting the well-being of the physically and mentally sub-standard. Christianity he condemned for its unwholesome asceticism and pointed out that the chief result has been a lamentable obsession with sex. He himself was a cultivated pagan who believed that life was meant to be enjoyed.

It was this belief that led Douglas to contrast Mediterranean man with Northern man and to defend the value of the Latin approach to life. Christianity and Judaism had blunted people's wits, bestialized their habits, ruined their very climate and landscape.

> The alert genius of the Greeks is clogged by a barbaric, leaden-hued religion—the fertile plains of Asia Minor and Spain converted into deserts! We begin, at last, to apprehend the mischief; we know who is to blame; we are turning the corner. Enclosed within the soft imagination of the *homo mediterraneus* lies a kernel of hard reason. We have reached that kernel. The Northerner's hardness is on the surface; his core, his inner being, is apt to quaver in a state of fluid irresponsibility. Yet there must be reasonable men everywhere; men who refuse to wear away their faculties

> in a degrading effort to plunder one another, men who are tried of bustle and strife.... Men are perceiving, I think, the baseness of mercantile ideals and military ideals, the loftiness of those older ones. They will band together, the elect of every nation, in god-favoured regions round the Inland Sea, there to lead serener lives ...And Mediterranean people will lead the way. They have suffered more than all from the imbecilities of kings and priests and soldiers and politicians; they now make an end of this neurasthenic gadding and getting. They focus themselves anew and regain their lost dignity. That ancient individualistic tone reasserts itself. Man becomes a personality once more.

Sanity and the Mediterranean view of life find their chief enemies in religion, philanthropy, democracy and the English. Religion has infected men with preposterous ideas of good and evil and with a passion for quarrelling about them. Asceticism and unnatural repression produces its inevitable sequel in monstrous and disgusting debauches. Moderation, the beautiful Greek ideal, is lost, and with it the possibility of happiness.

Douglas distinguished between the Greek or "horizontal" gods, invented by intellectualists who felt themselves capable of maintaining a kind of comradeship with their deities, and the Oriental gods, the "vertical" or "upstairs" variety, created by the proletariat, which loved to humiliate itself. Philanthropy is fallacious.

> Nobody must be protected against himself. The attitude of a man towards his fellows should be that of non-intervention, of benevolent egotism. Every person of healthy digestion was aware of that cardinal truth. Unfortunately persons of healthy digestion were not as common as they might be. Nobody had a right to call himself well-disposed towards society until he had grasped the elementary fact that the only way to improve the universe was to improve oneself and to leave one's neighbour alone.

Democracy is even worse it has impaired the quality of life.

> This lust of handling—what is its original name? Democracy. It has abraded the edge of the keen anthropocentric outlook of the Greeks which exalted whatever was distinctively human. Men have learnt to see beauty

> here, there and everywhere –a little beauty, mark you, not much! They fail to realize that in widening their capacity of appreciation they dilute its intensity. They have watered their wine. There is more to drink. The draught is poorer.

Norman Douglas, like Anatole France, to whom he is often indebted, was a man of epicurean temper and ironic detachment whose desire it was to lead men back to the sane ideal of the old pagan world. He hoped by a satiric exposure of the absurdities of our present way of life to shame us into accepting the wisdom of the past. His chief contributions to the novel include *They Went* (1920), an essay in myth-making, inspired by Breton folk-lore, but containing some highly diverting studies of modern types in antique guise; *In the Beginning* (1928), a wittily irreverent attack on religion; and *South Wind* (1917).

The last-named is Douglas's most brilliant book and a lively, pertinent satire on moral values. It can be said to have created a vogue for novels describing life among the self-exiled on the sunburnt shores of the Mediterranean, and it restored to Capri the publicity it had lost by the death of Tiberius. Moreover, *South Wind* set the seal of witty approval on a satiric view of life as the only possible attitude for a civilized man. Michael Arlen, Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley were not slow to learn the lesson Douglas taught.

The central informing thread of the book is that "in a certain set of circumstances favourable to the process the severest views on morals can be insensibly dissolved until the patient finds himself looking with toleration, if not actual approval, on almost every possible variety of human conduct, even murder."

The scene is set on the island of Nepenthe (immediately identified with Capri where Douglas lived). Assembled on it are the natives, lively, unscrupulous, pagan and amoral and a number of other persons all living under some sort of cloud. Particularly notorious are Freddy Parker, who runs the local drinking club, and Miss Wilberforce, an English lady who has reached years of indiscretion and is much addicted to drink. Her habit of divesting herself in public of her raiment when under the influence of Bacchanalian frenzy is a constant embarrassment to the English colony. Picturesque colour is lent by a group of White Russians, afflicted with strange beliefs and fanatically devoted to their "Messiah." An archaeo-

logist, a hagiographer, an epicurean Scotsman and an Italian count of ancient lineage and infinite charm provide the delightful conversations of which much of the book is composed. It is typical of Nepenthe that the Count, without surrendering one jot of his charm, should be engaged in fashioning "antique" statuettes for sale to American millionaires, and it is typical of Douglas's ironic humour that the art critics are invariably the first to be deceived. The loquacious little group are joined by the Bishop of Limpopo, who is enjoying a holiday, and whose beliefs and stern moral values, that have survived many years in the Tropics, undergo a complete reorientation during his stay on the island.

When *South Wind* appeared there was much speculation on the identity of the characters. But Douglas denied that he had originals in mind at all.

> I have never tried to draw a figure from life, as they say. My creed is that a human character, however engrossing, however convincing and true to itself, must be modelled anew before it can become material for fiction. It must be licked into shape, otherwise its reactions, in a world of fictitious characters, would be out of focus. No authentic child of man will fit into a novel. History is the place for such people—history or oblivion.

South Wind enshrined in literature a way of life that for the present, at any rate, and possibly for a long time ahead, can no longer be enjoyed. The book is a compendium of all that was most delightful in the Mediterranean world—a gay, lighthearted, witty record of a life of cultivated leisure not of the rich but of the interesting who temporarily at least overcome the dragon of Dullness.

With the novels of E. M. Forster the full tide of the liberal humanist tradition is encountered. Educated at Tonbridge School and Cambridge (where he took the Classical and Historical Tripos), Forster represents the qualities of intelligence, toleration and beliefs in individual freedom that were developed in the nineteenth century by the prosperous middle class to which he belonged. He drew his inspiration from traditional Classical culture, English literature, history and the culture of modern Europe, regarding their influence as the best safeguard for liberalism.

Although a rationalist, Forster, like Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, was convinced that life was something more than merely mental. A love of the bright pagan life of the senses, of impulse and spontaneous emotions, drew him to the Greeks, but his fastidious intelligence and innate dualism forced him to distrust the imaginative vision of life even while he succumbed to its inspiration. He was far from accepting Lawrence's religion of the blood and would have shrunk from a conception of human personality that was based on repulsion and attraction, voilence and primitive self-assertion. He was convinced that the "wisdom of the heart" had been too little considered in the nineteenth century, with the result that in spite of material progress there had been a weakening of human sympathy and understanding. Englishmen were especially to blame in this, since their educational system neglected the emotions and by overvaluing restraint as a means of developing character they impaired sensitivity. Hence his attack on thc Public Schools.

Forster, a liberal and a humanist, loved civilization, which he regarded as liberalism's finest achievement. But he perceived the peculiar dilemma confronting liberalism in the twentieth century. Liberalism was based on reason; it had rejected theology: its chief exponents were agnostic or vaguely pantheist. Moreover, reason which had denied the force of imagination was itself in danger of being swept away by irrational impulses the mere presence of which indicated an unadmitted hunger of the human soul for deeper satisfactions than trade, commerce and a civilized social system could provide. Reason was obviously not enough, but the alternatives were alarming and uncontrollable. Forster's problem was how to reconcile civilized order with imaginative awareness and the world of feeling.

Order, culture, toleration, admirable as they were in themselves, were so often balanced by hardness, complacency and insensitivity and by the absence of the vital principle that gave richness and joy to life. Those who were the pillars of society, respected guardians of civilization, often lacked heart and were devoid of tenderness. Down in the ripe human jungle among the swamps of passion both good and evil pulsated with stronger and more intense life than on the cleared cultivated uplands. According to Forster, who considered this problem in relation to England, the Englishman's weakness

lay in his fear of emotion, in his "undeveloped heart," which prevented him from understanding the human predicament in the world about him. This problem of the confused complexity of human character and relationships is the chief theme of Forster's novels.

No modern writer has so scrupulously set down the dusty answer life reserves for those who seek for certainties and expect to find clear-cut distinctions. His attitude to society provided the basis for the conflict embodied in his novels between the two ways of life—the way of the heart, which loves ond understands but is often confused and misguided, and the official way that preserves order but stifles genuineness and sincerity under a pall of good form and convention. Human beings tend to fall (in Forster's world) into two main groups, the "crustaceans" and the "vitalists." The former are the adherents of lifeless convention, hidebound conservatives whose responses, once conditioned in youth, are never modified by experience or understanding. They aie the enemies of the idea, they destroy love because their hearts are undeveloped and they cause the delicate fibres of human relationships to wither. Such people make admirable officials because they are rather less than human. Opposed to them are the "vitalists," who feel deeply and are not afraid of their feelings, who let the heart guide them in their relations with others, who take the broad view and refuse to let respect for convention stifle their generous impulses. Among the "crustaceans" in the novels are Ronnie Heaslop, Charlotte Elliot, Major Callender and the Turtons; the "vitalists" include such characters as Fielding, Mrs. Moore and George Emerson.

Forster served his apprenticeship to fiction as a writer of short stories. It was a long time before he achieved any popular success, although the publication of his first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, in 1905, aroused the interest of the discerning. A few critics recognized his gift for natural dialogue, his power of irony and humour and admired the fluent cadences of his low-toned and finely modulated prose.

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* the clash between the "crustaceans" and the "vitalists" is provoked by the marriage of a young English widow from irreproachable Sawston to a carefree, happy-go-lucky but utterly ineligible Italian. When she dies in childbiith her relatives feel they have a duty to claim the child from its disreputable father, who loves it and

is equally resolved to keep it. English conventionality, respectability and a loveless sense of honour and loyalty are defeated by Gino, the Italian who represents a kind of pagan masculine integration, who acts from conviction, not convention, from desire, not duty. But Gino's capacity for love and devotion to his child are only equalled by his cunning, cruelty and indifference where everything else is concerned. Forster never sentimentalizes his characters, for he knows how rare it is to find human motives unmixed.

The Longest Journey (1907) is a typical intellectual novel consisting rather of criticism of life than anything resembling life itself. The characters are "clever" people—points of doctrine, not human beings. Here the conflict develops between a young intellectual and the philistine he married, who represents the world and its sordid values. It is in this novel that Forster presents the case for the University :

> That is why I pity people who didn't go up to Cambridge, not because a university is smart, but because those are the magic years and with luck you see up there what you couldn't see before and mayn't ever see again. This is reality.

This vision of "the good life"—a life free from sordid strife and ambition, as old as Greece and perennially fresh and inspiring—sweetens life and gives it a significance unknown to those whose sensitivity to the beautiful and the true remains undeveloped.

In *A Room with a View* (1908) the struggle between the two groups takes place in a Florentine *pension*. Lucy Honeychurch arrives in Florence with her conventional cousin, Charlotte, whose horizon is bounded by propriety and notions of good form. The ladies find that the proprietor has failed to give them "rooms with views," but Charlotte is scandalized when one of the guests, old Mr. Emerson, proposes that the ladies shall exchange rooms with his son and himself. English bourgeois susceptibilities are outraged, but Forster makes it clear that it is the kindly, unconventional, slightly improper people who are in some way richer in feeling and understanding than the patterns of propriety who despise them and meet their warm effusiveness withicy contempt. For a time Lucy's soul becomes the battleground for the opposing forces

and she finds herself torn between Charlotte and her world and her love for George Emerson. Darkness wins when Lucy

> gave up trying to understand herself and joined the vast army of the benighted who follow neither the heart nor the brain, and march to their destiny by catchwords. The people who have yielded to the enemy within.

A room with a view is the symbol of those who love life and whose warm sympathies make them want to share their pleasures.

Howard's End (1910) is yet another episode in the eternal war between the two worlds, that in which personality grows and the other where it is suppressed. This time it is the life of the mind and the soul against the practical money-making life that has made Britain what it is. The cultured Schlegels come in contact with the Wilcoxes, but they learn from the encounter that "it takes all sorts to make a world."

As Forster saw it the skeins of life are tangled, there is muddle and mystery, nothing is either black or white, absolute right and wrong eludes the seeker after truth, and the only man who avoids disillusionment is he who believes nothing. "Everything exists, nothing has value."

It was not until the publication of *A Passage to India* (1924) that Forster gained widespread recognition. The time was then ripe for such a book. His Indian fragment had actually been written soon after he visited the country in 1912 and the scene is set in pre-war India, but by the time it was published Kipling's fierce and proud imperialism was out of date and discredited, and the prevailing liberal democratic temper of the age was sympathetic to Indian aspiration. America hailed the novel as an indictment of British rule, while in England the witty satire at the expense of the English official class in India ensured that the book would be popular with the intelligentsia. Forster was, incidentally, to show an almost prophetic insight into the future in the scene with which the book ends.

The novel presents a masterly study of racial antagonism — "two great races with different heritage and history, neither desiring to understand the other, and one of them in the wrong place." Forster shows uncommon skill in evoking the atmosphere of India, both Hindu and Mohammedan. And in

no other of his novels is there the same effortless economy of incident or a comparable power of suggesting the quality of personality through dialogue.

A brief effective plot sets the story in motion. The supposed assault on an English girl by a Mohammedan, Dr. Aziz, who has organized an expedition to the famous Marabar Caves, lets loose a storm in Chandrapore. In a series of lightning-flashes all the racial hate and resentment, prejudice, injustice and hysteria that lie below the surface of Anglo-Indian contacts are revealed and defy all efforts at reconciliation. For both sides the episode creates an atmosphere of illusion and shams; prejudice runs riot through both communities and sympathy and intelligence are the first victims It serves to divide the Europeans. On the one side are the "crustaceans"—the Turtons, Major Callender, Ronny Heaslop, whose solidarity is founded on unthinking prejudice against the natives, and Fielding, who continues to champion Dr. Aziz, in whose innocence he believes. Mrs. Moore, whose intuitive sympathy with Aziz is the starting-point of the adventure and whose personality has aroused love and admiration in him, leaves India before the case is heard.

Emotional restraint plays an important part in achieving Forster's purpose, which is to demonstrate the effects of the undeveloped hearts of the English administrators on an old, proud and spiritually superior civilization. Particularly brilliant is the study of the Mohammedan doctor Aziz. It would have been tempting to gain sympathy for this potential victim of British narrowness and prejudice by loading the dice in his favour and sentimentalizing him. But this is sternly resisted by Forster. In Aziz Forster has caught the mixture of pride, vanity and almost grotesque desire to please, his self-distrust and his genuine enthusiasm, and the insincerity called into play by his pathetic longing to be liked by the English, although at heart he despises them. His relations with them are uneasy; he is either over-familiar or unnaturally stiff and formal. In spite of his excellent qualities Aziz is always slightly ridiculous. He is at his best with Mrs. Moore, who is in sympathy with him, although she does not pretend to understand. Fielding, the Englishman whose large sympathies for India and whose efforts to secure her welfare and respect for her culture set him apart from the philistines in high places, may be said to represent the author's point of view.

A peculiar inconclusiveness underlies much of Forster's philosophy and may have its origin in the liberal tradition to which he belongs. Although he champions the good life and delights In beauty, nature and the warm impulses of man, Forster has no message for the spirit. Like Virginia Woolf, and for similar reasons, he is aware of the confusion and mystery that lie at the heart of life and, like her, believes that it is beyond man's efforts to understand. Belonging to a generation that denied the existence of absolute values, rejected the theological dogmas of the Middle Ages and was unable to anticipate a regenerated Christianity, Forster found fhere was nothing left but to contemplate the mystery and to hope that somehow "civilization" would gradually weaken it and cause it to disappear. To the end Forster remained a follower of intellectual *laissez faire*, putting his trust, but not too confidently, in that civilized solvent of hatred and prejudice – sweet reasonableness and toleration.

As a novelist Forster wrote sparingly and admitted that the novel form didn't inspire him : "there was too much story about it." His plots, however, reveal considerable mastery of technique, so that violence and even melodrama are accepted in his stories with the inevitableness that they possess in real life.

L. H. Myers, another novelist who chooses the Indian scene as a background for his finest studies, further resembled Forster in his exquisite literary craftsmanship and the slowness by which he came into his own. Myers was haunted by the chaos and disorder of modern life and he sought inspiration in a vanished civilization that, like his own, had witnessed the conflict between materialism and the world of spiritual values. He transferred the problems that agitated the post-war generation in England to the India of the great Mogul Emperor Akbar, who was contemporary with Queen Elizabeth. Akbar gave India unity and religious toleration, but he failed to inspire his sons with his ideals, and their rivalry, their decadence and violence, threatened the State with destruction.

When *The Near and the Far* and its sequel *Prince Jali* were first published in the early twenties they passed unrecognised, but when the last part of the trilogy was added and all three were published together under the title of *The Root and the Flower* (1935), success followed immediately

and Myers was awarded the James Tait Black Prize and the Femina Heureuse Prize.

The essence of this unique novel is hard to capture. Set in the framework of ancient India, the novel evokes, through the imagination, the high Court circle around the great Emperor, and it contrasts the sordid greed, the violence and intrigue in the world of politics with the consolations of Buddhism and the quest for spiritual peace. Particularly brilliant is Myers's handling of the rivalry between the Mogul's sons, one crude and violent, the other decadent and perverted with the lusts of a refined sadist. The storm centre raised By their conflicting political policies gathers force as the story develops and sweeps the chief characters into its destructive course. Contrasted with the passion and pain inherent in human contacts is the spiritual peace enjoyed by the blind Raja who, having fulfilled his duty as a ruler, gives up all his worldly possessions and leaves his young son and his beautiful wife to join the pilgrims seeking the spiritual way.

Myers's style has a rare quality and charm that is all his own. His prose is quiet and unemphatic, but possesses a pellucid beauty which interposes itself like a transparent veil softening but not obscuring the figures in his strange story.

The Pool of Vishnu, the sequel to *The Root and the Flower*, appeared in 1940. In this book the political revolt foreshadowed in the previous volume is brought to a head and involves the actors in tragedy. But the real importance of the book lies in the accounts of the conversations between Prince Jali, who must now take the cares of the rulership upon him, and his Guru. Early in life the Prince is brought in contact with pain, bitterness and death and his sensitive nature shrinks from further knowledge. Through the wisdom of the Guru he learns something of his duty and the part he is destined to play in life. Vishnu symbolizes the peace which passes all understanding and which is the reward of right action and non-attachment to the things of this world.

In a book touched with an autumnal sadness and breathing a spirit of resignation the author reflects through his chief characters on the pathos of human efforts as men endeavour to meet the recurrent challenge of materialism, violence, decadence, sadism and the strange and terrible force of blood lust. Myers is the first important writer to turn to the East

for a creed more acceptable to some modern minds than Christianity.

The philosophical conclusions to which Myers was drawn were shared a few years later by the most brilliant of the twentieth-century satirical novelists—Aldous Huxley. But Huxley was to traverpe much ground before he discovered a spiritually satisfying home in Buddhism.

Social historians of the future will undoubtedly turn to the writing of Huxley as a guide to an understanding of the generation that came to maturity between the First and Second World Wars. He was the spokesman of the "modernists." Lacking the imaginate power of Lawrence and the poetic sensitivity of Virginia Woolf, Huxley had a more assured grasp of the problems of the time and approached them with more knowledge and a better intellectual equipment than either. No other novelist painted such clever, cynical and devastating pictures of the .01 per cent of the population which, according to him, has ideas. He constituted himself the recording devil of the "lost generation," condemned for its heathen gaiety, its shifting hopes, its cynicism and disillusionment, and he was peculiarly well fitted for the task.

Born in 1894 and educated at Eton and Balliol (where he distinguished himself in *Litterae Humaniores*), Aldous Huxley united in himself all that was finest in the intellectual inheritance of the Victorians. His father, the son of Thomas Huxley, the scientist and apologist for Darwin, was a Professor of Greek, while his mother was related to Matthew Arnold. So that blended within him were the two conflicting currents of nineteenth-century scientific materialism and liberal idealism. In the first half of Huxley's life the first predominates, but after 1930 the philosophic pessimism of Matthew Arnold triumphed over the agnostic temper inherited from Thomas Huxley. It is probable that no more cultivated intelligence has ever employed the novel as a vehicle for social satire or used it to mirror the changing moods of his own mercurial personality.

Soon after the First World War ended Huxley began to delight his contemporaries and confound the moralists by a stream of essays, short stories and novels in which witty invention and sparkling epigrams were put to the service of a keen analytic mind intent on presenting the dangerously attractive doctrine of hedonism. Two literary influences are

clearly discerned. While the immediate stimulus was probably given by the publication of *South Wind* in 1917, echoes from Peacock's satiric romances were heard, and from Peacock, too, Huxley derived the idea of using the country house-party as a background for his assembled wits and theorists.

Crome Yellow (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) brought Peacock's world up to date possibly by the intermediary of W. M. Mallock's *The New Republic* (1877). A world of conversationalists, discussing promiscuity, life-worship (which had replaced Utility as the dogma of the age), eugenics, psychology and the new scientific experiments with insects and animals.

The style of the young novelist had a seductive charm. Here was a writer with something of the incisiveness of Swift and the well-bred ease of Congreve exploiting the ample resources of a dual vocabularly, scientific and literary, which gave him a wide range of metaphor and allusion and which was further enhanced by a precise knowledge of music and art. Intellectual exuberance found expression in pointed and often outrageous epigrams and in a tantalizing allusiveness that led him to choose recondite illustrations and to avoid the obvious. Nowhere, in spite of his erudition, was he stilted or pedantic, and his prose, although its appeal was primarily to the intellect, was capable of much vividness and colour in scenic description.

It would be idle to pretend that Huxley showed any power of creating characters—his egotism was too pronounced for that —but he possessed a malicious and observant eye and he wisely limited himself to the half-dozen types with which his own experiences had made him familiar. The resultant portraiture was excellent and the touch of satiric exaggeration only served to strengthen the impression he wished to make. His character groups invariably include middle-aged cultured voluptuaries who ask little more of life than readable books, amusing conversation, music, art, a quiet life and reasonable comfort, with perhaps a "delicate, lascivious, witty little flirtation." To this group belong Mr. Scogan in *Crome Yellow*, Mr. Mercaptan in *Antic Hay* and, best of them all, Mr. Cardan in *Those Barren Leaves*. Then there are the ladies, witty, voluptuous and uninhabited—Myra Viveash, Mary Thriplow and Veronica Thwale. Associated with them are the professionals, people who direct conversation into certain

channels and who throw over the novels and air of knowingness: the painters, musicians, scientists, biologists, politicians; and lastly the young people whose innocence does not survive long in this sophisticated setting.

Of the early novels *Crome Yellow* possesses the greatest charm, it is touched with lyricism, and the interpolated short stories of Sir Hercules, and the Lovely Lapiths, are wholly delightful. No other novel of Huxley's comes so close in spirit to Peacock—the Peacock of *Gryll Grange.*

Antic Hay, with its rollicking satire on the life worshippers, is perhaps the liveliest, while *Those Barren Leaves*, in which the action is set in Italy, is most richly satisfying. The last named has a full canvas of characters and they are admirably drawn; there is, too, a greater wealth of dramatic incident than in the other book. But even more important, *Those Barren Leaves* contains a hint of a change in Huxley's attitude, although it was not to be clearly articulated for many years. Most of the characters are easy-going pagans who take it for granted that the universe has no meaning and therefore the only thing to do is to enjoy oneself and take no thought for the morrow. But there is one exception—Calamy, who suggests a new seriousness. Calamy tries of a purely superficial social existence.

> I've met a lot of people, been in a great many curious situations, so that almost every potentiality latent in that part of my being has had a chance to unfold itself into actuality. . . . On the other hand, there is a whole universe within me, unknown and waiting to be explored; a whole universe that can only be approached by way of introspection and patient uninterrupted thought. . . . What one may find there is so important that it's almost a matter of life and death to undertake the search.

At the end of Calamy's defence of his new life there is a hint of the perennial philosophy:

> The incessantly changing social conventions and moral codes of history represent the shifting axes of reference chosen by the least curious, most myopic and worst-placed observers. But the axes chosen by the best observers have always been startlingly like one another. Gautama, Jesus and Lao-tze, for example; they lived sufficiently far from one another in space, time and social position. But their pictures of reality resemble one another very closely.

And Calamy leaves society for a lonely, meditative sojourn in the mountains.

The new note sounded in *Those Barren Leaves* is certainly not struck again in *Point Counter Point*, which followed in 1928. From the literary aspect this is Huxley's masterpiece in fiction and owes not a little of its tautness and form to the influence of Andre Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs*.

Point Counter Point is a study in frustration, the frustration brought about by the conflict between passion and reason. According to Huxley, two thousand years of Christianity had resulted only in self-division. Men had attempted to live in obedience to a repressive ethic instead of in accordance with natural law. And what had been the result? Not innocent joy, or happiness, not peace and love, but violence, hypocrisy, lechery, sadism and perversion. Man's foolish attempt to deny the validity of the senses and pretend that he is a spiritual being has condemned him to wretchedness and self-destruction. Some half-dozen characters are chosen to represent the various forms ot seif-division and they are studied in their reactions to sex. All are condemned. None achieves happiness, and even the purely promiscuous sensualists like Lucy Tantamount are finally cheated of their pleasure. The romantics find that passion divorced from reason makes life a mockery. The rational intellectual with his analytic reason destroys spontaneity and the power to feel and sympathize. There is no escape ; those who pervert the sex instinct and those who sublimate it are alike destroyed by self-division and find their ultimate solution in "murder, suicide and rape."

Alone among the self-divided Mark Rampion, the life-worshipper, said to represent D. H. Lawrence, achieves wholeness. Mark is a vitalist and the norm by which all the other characters are measured and condemned. But Huxley was never more than a cerebral vitalist, and although there is much talk of vitalism there is little evidence of it in a book which is a prolonged study of the theme of frustration—the malady of modern life.

A special technique described as "the musicalization of fiction" enables Huxley to modulate from one key theme to another, from the physico-chemical aspect of things, from the religious to the physiological. In this way he conveys a simultaneous impression of the whole image of society.

All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel contrapuntal plots. While Jones is murdering a wife, Smith is wheeling the perambulator in the park. You alternate the themes. More interesting, the modulations and variations are also more difficult. A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters. He shows several people falling in love, or dying, or praying in different ways, dissimilars solving the same problem. Or vice versa, similar people confronted with dissimilar problems. In this way you can modulate through all the aspects of your theme, you can write variations in any number of moods.

The total effect of *Point Counter Point* is one of bitter disillusionment with society, but the novel contains some of Huxley's most brilliant writing and coruscating epigrams. In it he discharges a quiverful of spleen at his contemporaries, many of whom appear but lightly disguised.

Only one other satire of the period possesses comparable brilliance—namely *The Apes of God* (1930-1) by Percy Wyndham Lewis, who had the distinction of being the only important writer to stand for the old order against the modernists. His mannered but masterly attack on the gods and shibboleths of a generation lost to the Classical tradition of reason and balance contains some caustic satire at the expense of the fashionable "isms."

In *Point Counter Point* Huxley had suggested that if industrial civilization could be inoculated with vitalism and people could be freed from meaningless moral inhibitions and allowed to live fully the life of the senses all would be well. The pagan freedom from moral restraint which seemed so enchanting in literary Arcadias and in the pages of Algernon Blackwood and Norman Douglas might prove to be the panacea for a frustrated devitalized generation.

In *Brave New World* (1932) the combination of scientific materialism and hedonism is accomplished. But the results are disquieting. It is evident in this book that Huxley is searching for a new faith to replace the vitalism which if it were allied to industrial civilization could only prove disastrous. Reference has been made already to the change in values which manifested itself in literature in the nineteen thirties. Society, which for over a century had seemed so secure from any resurgence of primitive violence, suddenly found itself in the grip of a new savagery ; racial persecution returned, blood lusts were justified, peace denounced while

war and the heroic virtues were glorified. All the olddemons that liberalism had exorcised returned. And humanity, as if tired of the light of reason, began to grope for the darkness. There was a marked revival of interest in all so-called occult subjects and many of these found their way into literature, while evidence is not lacking that mysticism and the spiritual philosophies of the East began to cast a spell over those who had hitherto accepted life-worship and hedonism as the only creed for a sane world.

It is against this background that Huxley wrote *Brave New World*. In this Swiftian fantasy he presents a future State dominated by science which has discovered how to produce life in the laboratory. Pain, dirt, disease, squalor, poverty and conflict have all been abolished in this scientific paradise. Every physical desire is encouraged and can be gratified. Restraint is unknown because it is unnecessary. Science has effectively done away with the unpleasant consequences of human concupiscence. Youth, beauty and vitality endure as long as life, while conditioning of the mind and body ensures that everyone is perfectly adjusted to society and therefore cannot be other than completely happy.

But the price that has had to be paid for Utopia is a heavy one. Emotion has been eliminated from life, with the result that there is no art, culture, religion, love, ideals, loyalty or personality. The world is inhabited by healthy automata whose lives and amusements are completely mechanized. Now that stability has been achieved it is preserved by a rigid censorship over all scientific and philosophic investigation.

Having built up his picture of a scientifically controlled State, Huxley proceeds to demolish it by introducing the Savage, John, who represents the old world of religion and cultural values and who voices Huxley's opinions in two long conversations with the controller of this Brave New World. The Savage tries to call on the people to revolt against this spiritual serfdom, but they do not understand him and he is driven to suicide.

In *Brave New World* Huxley is clearly on the side of the angels and prepared to accept suffering, tragedy and the mystery and agony of death so long as he can have assurance of the reality of the spirit.

The new-found respect for the spirit is further developed in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), in which he reveals a deeper

concern for the quality of human personality. Technically this long novel represents Huxley's most ambitious effort. The story, which is not related continuously but in flashbacks and by means of a diary, covers a period of thirty years, from the beginning of the twentieth century, during which time the hero, Antony Beavis, undergoes a moral and psychological metamorphosis. His career is shown in a series of carefully selected portraits illustrating significant moments in the course of his development. Episodes widely separated in time are juxtaposed so that their effect is realized. By subordinating the chronological sequence of events to a kind of psychological montage Huxley is able to weight certain experiences that produce no immediate effect on Antony, but years later can be recognized as having contributed to his spiritual conversion. Antony is a typical Huxley character—intellectual, witty, pagan, flippant and a complete amoralist. In his early twenties he is indirectly responsible for the suicide of his best friend, whose sincere, emotional nature he utterly fails to understand. Antony is able to conceal the part he has played in precipitating the tragedy and he goes on his lighthearted way apparently unaffected by what has happened. Knowledge of the suicide and Antony's responsibility are kept from the reader until the end of the story, when it is dramatically reviewed in the light of Antony's realization that all life is one, that separateness is evil and self-destroying and that true understanding is only to be gained through love and sympathy for those who are unlike us.

The latter part of the book is, in fact, a long sermon on non-attachment and the one-ness of life. The main sources of these ideas lay for Huxley in the great religions of the Far East, especially in Buddhism, with its emphasis on non-resistance and universal pity.

Antony's growing disillusionment with the world he had hitherto admired reflects Huxley's own distaste for the witty, irresponsible pagan society he once delighted to portray. The novel abounds in brilliant studies of all the traditional Huxley types, while characters like Mark Staithes and Dr. Miller are indicative of the new-found respect for spiritual integrity. The extent to which the preacher was beginning to absorb the novelist can be seen in the long interpolated essays on personality, pacificism and the Buddhist view of life. That the moralist was no longer prepared to ignore the consequences

of vice is shown in the treatment meted out to Antony's mistress Mary Amberley, who in the earlier novels would have been spared the spectacle of her physical decay. In spite of the growing interest in mysticism and things of the spirit the old obsessional disgust of the body, a link between Swift and Huxley, is still dominant. Huxley cannot forgive the body, and he is fascinated by his own disgust.

Two non-fictional works, *Ends and Means* (1938) and *Grey Eminence* (1940), both concerned with the new philosophy, followed. Huxley accepts the existence of a supramundane reality, but believes that we are bound to this world of illusion through desire, which springs from self-hood. *Grey Eminence* is an interesting study of Pere Joseph, the spiritual guide of Richelieu, a mystic, but one whose counsels were evil because he could not dissociate hjs ambitions for his country from spiritual truth. Ambition always won, but he concealed it from himself by maintaining the pretence that the will of the State was the will of God. Father Joseph became a hypocrite in the world of the spirit and a false teacher.

In 1939 Huxley left Europe for California and settled in Hollywood and Los Angeles. At the sight of follies more gorgeous and fantastic than any he had known in Europe the satirist in him received a new stimulus. The result was *After Many a Summer* (1940). This is a closely knit novel with an exciting main plot, but its basic theme is philosophic —the contrast between two conceptions of time, that of the mystic and that of the scientist. To the biologist eternity is a mere extension of physical life ; to the mystic eternity can be experienced here and now, through expansion and intensification of consciousness, a spiritual activity.

The novel opens with a satiric study of the reckless display of wealth in the New World very much in the manner of the early Huxley - witty, cynical and not a little blasphemous. Rarely has ostentation, unchecked by taste or culture, been so felicitously portrayed as in the picture of Joe Stoyte's twentieth-century castle with its chromium-plated portcullis, its fourteenth-century stained glass in the bathroom, and Gothic cocktail bar. The plot is concerned with the attempts of an unattractive middle-aged American millionaire to prolong the duration of his life. To this end he subsidizes the researches of a brilliant young scientist—Dr. Obispo. An unexpected confirmation of the doctor's theory is found in an

old diary belonging to a nobleman living in the eighteenth century, who had apparently anticipated the elixir, tried it on himself, and communicated the extraordinary result to his diary. Following clues in the diary, the party set off for England and discovered the eighteenth-century experimenter still living in the cellars of an old English house. But time has done strange things to the fifth Earl of Gonister; "the foetal ape" has had time to grow up, with the result that in his two hundredth year he has the appearance and the behaviour of a monkey. The prolongation of life, Huxley implies, would produce not the expected superman but a regression to an earlier stage of development. Wisdom lies not on the side of Joe Stoyte and Dr. Obispo, but with the mystically-minded Mr. Propter, who seeks to develop his soul through the practice of universal pity.

No further novel appeared for some time, until in 1945 Huxley published *Time Must Have a Stop*. This showed a startling return in manner to the style of *Crome Yellow* and *Antic Hay*. Something of the old flippancy hardening into malice is seen in the portraits of Uncle Eustace, Mrs. Gamble, Sebastian and Veronica Thwale. The characters are typical early Huxley—aesthetes, epicureans, a nymphomaniac who looks like a Madonna, and the obnoxious puritans who act as foils for the pagan wits. The only sympathetic character is Bruno Rontini, a pacifist, who sacrifices himself for another.

Undoubtedly the most original aspect of *Time Must Have a Stop* is Huxley's attempt to explore the consciousness after death. Uncle Eustace, middle-aged, voluptuary and epicurean, dies at the beginning of the book just as he is looking forward to exasperating his puritan brother by introducing his attractive young nephew, Sebastian, into his own hedonist way of life. Mrs. Gamble regards the death of her brother-in-law as an excuse to satisfy her curiosity about the after-life. To this end she arranges two seances, which are described at some length in the book. The author uses the mystical contrast between the intense white radiance of eternity and the dark clot of human personality that stains it to emphasize his belief that after death the personality fearing the loss of its identity foolishly fights against absorption in the universal consciousness.

The satirist in Huxley enjoys the spectacle of Eustace's disembodied consciousness hanging about the scene of his

earthly satisfactions and making ineffectual efforts to experience through the body and breath of a garlic-and-chocolate-eating medium the old life of the senses :

> The damned light was now definitely out; and with these newly-recovered sensations hopping and twittering like twenty thousand sparrows, there was no question any more of silence. And how welcome even lumbago could be, even this obscure and unfamiliar belly-ache.

The hopelessness of attempting to establish contact between the physically dead and the living is made transparently clear. Without a medium there can be no contact, but the medium is "a lump of organized imbecility and everything has to pass through the filter of this intermediate knowledge, or rather ignorance." The commonplace, stupid medium distorts what she hears to fit in with her own understanding, so that communication is effectively frustrated.

An epilogue carries the action of the novel down to the outbreak of the Second World War, and the book ends with a reaffirmation of the principles by which Huxley has been guided since *Eyeless in Gaza*. Seen in the light of the war—inevitable result of humanity's surrender to separateness, nationalism and hate – spiritual unity and pacifism seem more than ever justified and inescapable if man is to be saved from self-destruction.

Huxley made little or no contribution to the development of the novel as an art form; in fact his novels are really essays and conversations strung together on a slender thread of plot. But he did for fiction what Shaw had done for the drama, namely, made intellectual discussion as exciting as emotional experience. He created in fiction an image of the dynamic world of ideas that underlies the changing outward society. In the nineteen forties he set up as a guide and teacher for mankind, but it is doubtful if he possessed the necessary spiritual equipment to change the heart of man by his preaching. He lacked humility and love. Sardonic laughter, however stimulating to the satirist, has never made converts.

Failure to persuade humanity to follow him along the path of non-attachment and unity provoked Huxley to a savage denunciation of man in *Ape and Essence* (1949), a bitter novel, in which he predicts the bestial degradation of the

human species after a third world war. His secular pessimism leads him to ignore the wisdom of the Perennial Philosophy and suggests that his preoccupation with spiritual matters is mainly intellectual and is not matched by any inner faith.

Nevertheless his mental evolution in the two decades between the wars, reflecting as it does an important trend of intellectual opinion, gives him a unique value as a commentator in modern fiction.

It is fitting that a short history of the English novel (in the first four decades of the twentieth century) should end with a consideration of the work of James Joyce, in whom the twentieth-century passion for experiment in literary form reached its climax. Born in Dublin in 1882 and intended for the priesthood, Joyce was educated by the Jesuits, but after passing through a period of spiritual doubt and unrest he rejected Catholicism and left the Church. The possession of a fine tenor voice suggested a musical career, but was frustrated by his acute shortsightedness (he failed to get a scholarship), and he turned to the study of medicine.

The break with the Church was followed later by voluntary exile from his country, and apart from one brief visit to Ireland Joyce spent the rest of his life on the Continent, spending his last years at Zurich in Switzerland. By these actions Joyce destroyed the unity of his life, and from one point of view his art may be regarded as an attempt to recover that unity and create through it a synthesis of national experience. An intellect, subtle to the point of eccentricity, with its roots firmly planted in the medieval world, stiffened and disciplined by a long training in dialectic and theology, enabled him to bring to the novel a rare integrity of purpose and unique capacity for laborious effort. But the intellectual consistency was not matched by an inner psychological tranquillity. There is evidence in his works that Joyce remained a prey to the spiritual conflicts that led to his apostasy. As an adolescent he suffered anguish of mind from considering the doctrine of original sin and from a too lively apprehension of the horrors of hell. It is not unlikely that the blasphemy and irreverence in which he later delighted were the reverse side of a mind that could not shake itself free from an obsession with sin and its eternal consequences. Joyce never freed himself from the sense of sin; for him there was no escaping the fact that the fall into sensuality was a Fall.

His attitude to Ireland was characterized by a similar ambivalence. On the surface there are revilings and contempt for "the old sow that eats her farrow," but below the surface a deep longing for the ties of race. Evincing a bitter hatred of the politics that in his day bedevilled Irish life, he professed for his country a lively scorn, but it sprang from frustrated love rather than from any innate dislike, and during his long exile his imagination remained bound to his native land. He re-created it perpetually. Every successive stage in his literary journey represented an attempt to re-create Dublin by plunging deeper and deeper into its history and, by a process of imaginative integration, to reveal its essential life in all its immediate reality.

His first important prose writings were the autobiographical short stories, *The Dubliners* (1914), the most Irish of all his works. His object in writing them was: "to give the Irish people one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking glass." These clear-cut, unsentimental studies of Irish life and types reveal the superstition, vacillation and the numbing inhibitions that paralyse their wills and limit their lives. Unity is given to the stories by certain recurrent themes and images drawn from the rites and doctrines of the Catholic Church. For Joyce it was a paralysed faith that both attracted and repelled him.

Joyce's truly individual art only began to show itself in the autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which owed not a little to George Moore in its analytical detachment. How carefully Joyce worked to depersonalize his art can be seen by comparing *A Portrait* with a fragment of the first draft which was published posthumously in 1944 under the title of *Stephen Hero*. The early draft is far more personal and the emotional conflicts that agitated Joyce's youth are more directly expressed. A comparison between the two versions throws a revealing light on his aesthetic methods, his desire to depersonalize his art so that the idea should be realized with complete objectivity. To this end he eliminated in the final version all direct personal references and set the action as far as possible inside the consciousness of his hero at the very quick of his experience. What Stephen thinks is the heart of the book.

In *A Portrait* we seem to be "looking at a room through the keyhole." What can be clearly made out has sharp outlines

and decided limits, but all round there is a tantalizing penumbra that suggests the presence of evocative shapes in dark corners. Everywhere are hints of a significant dimension just out of reach.

As a revelation of Joyck's power to explore the psychology of his own nature with detachment and scientific curiosity *A Portait of the Artist as a Young Man* is unparalleled in a period rich in self-analysis. Pride and sensuality struggle for the possession of the soul of Stephen Daedalus, who, having rejected the help of religion, seeks to escape into tranquillity through the impersonality of art.

> He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the greater artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring, beautiful, impalpable, imperishable.

Already the strange and compelling magic inherent in Joyce's mastery of words is suggested in the famous sermon on the nature of Hell and the description of the nightmare vision of physical horror it creates for the sensitive boy. What impresses the reader who is familiar with the author's later experimental work is the unexpected strain of romantic lyricism that runs through the book. Something of the beauty of the contemporary Celtic Revival seems to have passed into its mood and released the lyric impulse in Joyce, while the recurrent epithets—grey, pale, cool, the images drawn from water, from the effects of light and the flight of birds—give a poetic loveliness to many passages. At this time his prose seems to possess Paterlike cadences that, for example, lend the scene in which he describes Stephen watching a young girl wading at eventide in shallow water a true romantic ecstasy. In spite of the extraordinary interest of *A Portrait*, and the charm and beauty of the writing, the novel attracted little attention and found favour only with the few.

The next six years after the publication of *A Portrait* were spent by Joyce in writing *Ulysses*, which first appeared in serial form in 1919 and then as a book in 1922. How the book was received in England and America is a dramatic story which has often been told. The unremitting realism which led Joyce to set down every thought that passed through the minds of his characters was responsible for the ban that was placed on it in these countries and that was not lifted for

fifteen years And yet it was entirely unnecessary – few books are less pornographic and more cathartic than *Ulysses*. Those who obtained copies (and there was a flourishing trade in contraband copies from the Continent) complained that the book was unintelligible, its formal complexities left readers baffled and confused. But as time passed and the strange idiom began to be understood and familiarity lessened the shock of an entirely new literary idiom, appreciation became possible. Various interpretations appeared; the author's purpose was adumbrated by those who had access to him, and by the nineteen thirties the taste by which *Ulysses* could be understood and admired had been created.

The lyric impulse that had imparted conventional beauty to the earlier work was sternly suppressed in *Ulysses* in obedience to a philosophic and aesthetic integrity never before so consciously striven for and so completely achieved in a novel. In *A Portrait* Stephen discusses at some length the aesthetic principles which are to guide him in his career as an artist.

> ... "the most satisfying relations of the sensible must therefore correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Find these and you find the qualities of universal beauty. Aquinas says: *Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritis, consonantia, claritas.* I translate it so: Three thing are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance."

Rejecting the Romantic idea that art must in effect reveal something of the divine and that its "radiance" is in the nature of a metaphysical afterglow, Joyce equated the *claritas* of Aquinas with objective realism: "The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the whatness of a thing." Stephen goes on to describe the function of the artist in creation and the passage is of importance in defining what he set out to do in *Ulysses*.

> The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea .... The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible aesthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself

> out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. The aesthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of aesthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

This view of his artistic purpose would enable Joyce to express "the ineluctable modality of the visible" and create in the work of art the perfect and complete image of life itself.

Such a conception of art necessarily rejects beauty as extraneous decoration or embellishment, but emphasizes its importance aa fidelity to objective truth. The complete artistic truth of a human situation would reveal its *claritas*, or beauty. Linked to this notion of the beautiful was the medieval idea with which Joyce had become acquainted through his theological studies of man and his little world as the *microcosm* of the universe. The image of the whole of life could be reflected in the part. Dublin, loved, hated, and lost, became for Joyco the centre of his rebel world. Somewhere the fragmentary glimpses of life were resolved into wholeness, the disconnected moments were seen as part of some vast design. It was the duty of the artist to capture this sense of design and to still the chaotic flux of incident and impression into an immortal stasis.

This briefly is the aesthetic idea which Joyce attempted to realize in *Ulysses*. Already under the influence of Vico's theory of the stages in the development of man from mythic, legendary and religious, through the heroic to the human, Joyce took as his framework the Homeric Odyssey and translated the action into eighteen episodes from a day in the lives of three people living in Dublin. Parallels between the Homeric version of the wanderer and Joyce's modern Ulysses are implicit and without being emphasized help to suggest among other things the decline from the heroic age to the tamely human. For example, the rocks flung at Ulysses by the outraged Cyclops become a biscuit tin hurled at Bloom during a tavern quarrel by irate Irish Nationalists, while Circe, enchantress and daughter of the Sun, who turns men into beasts, finds her modern equivalent in Bella Cohen, the repulsive mistress of a brothel.

The twentieth-century Odyssey is (on the surface) a prosaic affair confined to the actions of a single day, 16 June, 1904, in Dublin. On this day the author stations himself, as it were, within the consciousness of three people, and through their awareness of existence he builds up a composite image of Dublin, microcosm of the universe. The modern Ulysses is Leopold Bloom, an Irish Jew, a canvasser, kindly, natural and simple, approching all the experiences of life in the mood of *l'homme moyen sensuel* Constrasted with him is the modern Telemachus, the tortured, intellectual Stephen Daedalus, bitter, cynical and obsessed by pride, the pride that isolates him from his fellows. Linking their two worlds by her desires is Molly, Bloom's uninhibited and far from faithful wife—the expression of complete femininity whose contemplations form the subject of the last part of the book. She is the Penelope figure.

There are few incidents. Stephen quarrels with friends—his pride is at the root of the trouble—is thrown out of the Martello tower in which he has been living, and leaves his job. Bloom attends a funeral, visits the National Library, and calls at a maternity hospital where an acquaintance is bearing a child, and later rescues Stephen from a brawl. Molly commits an act of adultery, and, while Dublin sleeps, muses in a series of long, unpunctuated sentences on her remembered lusts. These are the primary events considered. Modern life is anti-heroic, anti-aristocratic, uninspired, mediocre; yet, behind its apparently trivial and meaningless confusion, the same forces are at work that in a different age produced deeds of high renown.

Ulysses is pervaded by Freudian psychology which not only helps to explain the rather obscure relations between Stephen, Leopold and Molly, but has inspired the brilliant surrealist "Circe" episode towards the end of the book. Bloom, filled with a protective desire to help Stephen, follows him late at night into the night-town area of Dublin. Stephen is drunk and excitable; Bloom is tired, and under the influence of the strange environment the normal psychological mechamism which controls thinking breaks down and what follows is a dramatic phantasmagoria in which all Bloom's unspoken thoughts and suppressed desires are suddently materialized in the dream become the reality.

Joyce's mastery of language, his range of vocabulary, his power to create words and to use them to render the impact of sensation on the nerves, and above all his unique virtuosity, are everywhere manifested. In one chapter alone Joyce suggests the development of the embryo in the womb in terms of the changing English prose style from the clumsy inchoate beginnings through clearly articulated structural forms to the extravagant beauty and variety of a finished style. Joyce's imitations of individual masters of prose style are impeccable. The verbal ingenuity that was eventually to produce *Finnegans Wake* is seen in the frequent puns, while nowhere is his dialectic brilliance better revealed than in Stephen's analysis of Hamlet in a discussion which takes place in the Dublin National Library.

For the first time in literary history an attempt was made to achieve realism by setting aside, as far as possible, the selective principle and allowing the "stream of consciousness" to flow on uninterruptedly, carrying with it all the debris of a psychological underworld. The motley fancies of Stephen's brain leap from remembered erudition to actual experiences in quick confusion, certain fundamental obsessions recurring in many different guises; Bloom's half-thoughts, the commonplace workings of his mind, the imperfect expressions, the sequences of free and unbridged association—in short, all the fruits of his observation and mentally uninhibited desires—are poured pell-mell on to the pages.

The whole man, Joyce would seem to suggest, is the sum of his parts, and the character—Stephen, Bloom and Molly—create themselves through the complete expression of what they contemplate within. Any inconsequence is more apparent than real. In the mind of the artist and in the work of art there is design, and what seems dynamic and confused in the actions of the story in actual experience is resolved by the artist into an eternal stasis. Actually Joyce carried his respect for "consonantia" to such lengths that he not only sought the right word but the right and absolute order of words within the sentence. So that a chaotic train of telescoped memories and impressions is seen finally to have had a logical consistency when once the origins are discovered. In this way Joyce accomplished the paradoxical feat of combining extreme subjectivity, since his material is simply consciousness, with complete objectivity in his method of presentation.

Space forbids a more detailed consideration of this strange novel, in which the composition is so much more important than the story. But it must be admitted that despite the incidental brilliance, wit and originality of *Ulysses* and its unusual ground plan, the total effect of the book is less exciting than withering and depressing, The world that has been presented with such unloving detachment is a waste land possessed by collective mediocrity that is at once the heir of the ages and the grave wherein all beauty, valour, renown and value lie buried. An impression is conveyed that life is mean and sordid, the impulses of affection and goodwill are misunderstood, the barriers that divide human personalities are insurmountable; an earthiness pervades *Ulysses* and the author fails to relate man to any scheme of things that transcends his own desires. There is little elation. Bloom, in spite of his kindliness, humour and naturalness, is a bore; Molly, "the refined essence of unrefined femininity," is even more tedious in her utter absorption within her sexual interests; while Stephen, the only character known to his author introspectively, is condemned not to reveal his inner self by Joyce's strict concern for objective realism. For the essence of Stephen lies in his refusal to commit himself. His pride makes him reject affection, and as he threads his way in and out of Bloom's life he is engaged exclusively in the worship of divine "Skepsis." The tone throughout the book is ironic and satiric, for it is through satire and mockery that Joyce found a way of escape from his "anguish of mind."

Ulysses remains one of the major literary experiments of the twentieth century, a work of supreme masculine intellection and feminine hypersensibility to details in which technical brilliance has helped to create an unforgettable image of Dublin on Bloomsday. Dublin, with its historic streets, its pubs, its people, its songs, its legends, its strange past and hopeless present, is the subject of his book.

For the next seventeen years Joyce was busy working on the sequel to *Ulysses*, which he referred to as *Work in Progress*. From time to time extracts appeared in the periodical Transition and some parts were published separately in little booklets bearing such mystifying titles as *Anna Livia Plurabelle, The Mine of Nick, Mick and the Maggies, Two Tales of Shem and Shaun. Ulysses* had aroused a storm of excited protest, but the fragments of *Work in Progress* were received

in a stunned silence. Even those whose understanding of *Ulysses* had ripened in the course of time into genuine appreciation were as baffled as the tyros. Some critics professed to discover lyrical beauty and poetic undertones in *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, while others admired the verbal ingenuity which enabled the author to weave, in the form of puns and anagrams, the names of over a hundred rivers into the passage celebrating the Liffey—prototype of all rivers and so containing them all.

At last in 1939 the *magnun opus* was published with the title of *Finnegans Wake*, but the long-awaited literary event was ecilpsed in importance by the political crisis that led to the outbreak of war. A year later Joyce died in Switzerland, hurt and embittered by the lack of interest shown in him by the world. Yet even had there been no war it is doubtful if any immediate appreciation could fairly have been expected. Joyce had taken seventeen years to write *Finnegans Wake* and the would-be-reader needed some time to grow accustomed to the revolutionary idiom. Nothing was made easy; there were no clues, no footnotes, and in place of the accessible Homeric framework there were obscure Irish heroes and the ransacked mythologies of several civilizations.

What has been called Joyce's "perverse passion for the inert and undistinguished" showed itself in the choice of Humphery Chimpden Earwicker, a Dublin publican with three children and a middle-aged matronly wife, as the hero—the sleeping Everyman. But what chiefly impressed and bewildered the reader who groped his way into the book was the verbal chaos that reigned there. The normal structure of words was broken down, roots from more than seventeen languages were integrated into a new synthesis, a kind of philological palimpsest. Yet the effects, although strange, were not in some passages without a certain wild poetic magic. Working on the principle of accumulated significance, Joyce continually extended the range of meanings within a word—the technique of the pun—until, in order to unravel the concealed meanings, the reader required an omniscience equal to the author's. There is a contrapuntal use of many languages. Often the understanding of a word depends upon the knowledge of its Sanscrit root or its Russian equivalent. Thus the old women washing on the banks of the Liffey are "pratschata at their platschpails," where *prachka* and *plach* are Russian for

laundres and crying.

Perverse as Joyce's method may seem, it is utterly logical and his philology is both witty and accurate. One or two examples must suffice. Thus the meanings implicit in the word "solicitor," its association both with the law and immorality, are made more subtly complex by writing the words as "salaciter" and stressing the secondary associations with salacious. In the same way Joyce brilliantly links disease and civilization and all that they imply in the effective pun—syphilization. Psychologists should appreciate "introvent." Life proceeds in "vicous circles."

A "pyramidal allusiveness" was embodied in myriads of details and propagated by continuous digression. Joyce is said to have laboured for one thousand six hundred hours on the draft of *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, working over and over the passage until the suggestive force had spent itself and the words composing it were saturated with potential association. No easy transitions are made from one phase to another and the changes in the current of narration are sudden and seem capricious and arbitrary. Paradoxically, in a book that purports to tell the story of man from the time of proto-history, a few trite and commonplace happenings suffice to bear the vast superstructure of philology, mythology, history, politics and philosophy.

To give logical coherence to so involved a book would demand a prolonged and detailed anylysis out of place in a short survey of the novel. Suffice it to say that *Finnegans Wake* is the literary epitaph of the last two thousand years, and in it fiction, which has swallowed so many forms, has attempted to absorb the historic consciousness. It used to be Joyce's boast that if Dublin were destroyed and *Ulysses* remained it would be possible to build up an image of the city with complete realism. In *Finnegans Wake* his task was vaster. If European civilization were obliterated, future historians could with patience unravel the clues and discover its beliefs and activities from Joyce's book, although unless the study of Celtic mythology replaces the Classical, they would probably find the unexpected Irish angle rather disconcerting. Dublin, Irish history, both legendary and recent ; Vice's *La Scienza Nuova* ; Spengler's *Decline of the West*, together with Groddeck's etymologies ; the legend of Tristan and Iselde : the Phoenix Park murder ; Freudian doctrines of

ambivalence and the Oedipus complex ; Jung's conception of the archetypes of the collective unconscious present in dreams: myths and creative art have all contributed to the composite image of man and his destiny that Joyce spent seventeen years building. The book is a monument of twentieth-century erudition and an expression of the desire to find unity in diversity and to trace back the manifold expressions of human endeavour to a few primal patterns.

Uncompromising as ever in his search for objective realismt. Joyce turns his attention away from the waking life of his characters to explore the fantastic underworld of the unconscious, believing that there is to be found the past and with it the significance of humanity.

H. C. Earwicker, the hero, lies sleeping through the whole of the book, and all that happens is found in the strange inner world of his dreams. But as he represents Everyman and is a microcosm his sleeping life recapitulates the history of mankind. Joyce burrows deep into the night-consciousness of his fecund Everyman – Earwicker—and in doing so is able to probe into the human past that is locked up in the world of dreams, images and fantasy. Rightly understood, these elusive symbols would provide the epitome of man's history and explain his nature, but the further from the threshold of consciousness they lie, the more difficult they are to express in rational terms and the more incomprehensible and confused they become. And yet the further back we go into the past the nearer we approach our object, which is the understanding of man's original nature.

One man's sleep on one night in Chapelizod reaches out to encompass the collective unconscious of the race and the world's cyclical history. From Ibsen, his first master, Joyce had learnt the art of being at once confined and vast. He put it to an unexpected use.

Joyce sees all life in terms of a dichotomy. Life spins its way between eternal polarities, life-death, love-hate, war-peace, heaven-hell, and these are in turn derived from the attraction and repulsion inherent in the division of the sexes, and this war of the sexes has its origins in the proto-historic overthrow of the matriarchies. There is no escape from the original sin which is reborn with each new life. Lucifer fell through Pride, and man through sensuality, and at every stage of human development the drama of the Fall is re-

enacted. The contrasting principles under which man encounters all experience—the warp and woof of life—are worked into the tissue of his theme. For instance, every human war is an expression of the primal fight between Mick and Nick, between Michael and Lucifer—the fight in Heaven between the forces of good and evil.

Unifying the diversity is the feminine life-force symbolized throughout the book by water—the River Liffey, the river of life, Anna Livia Plurabelle.

Opposed to the river—the organic spontaneous flow of life—is the city, symbolized by the tower, expression of masculine power, since the city derives not from the family but from the masculine assemblies, the solidarity of men.

In the swift, ever-changing river Joyce finds *das Ewig-Weibliche*, the key image of the great cycle which has neither beginning nor end and is the symbol of humanity. From the fresh silver-flashing stream at its source, through the broad clear river which flows into the city and is there soiled by the refuse and impurities of time, the scum and filth of the city, Anna Livia's course is followed, until, tiring of its burdens, the river prepares to plunge back into the sea, civilization destroys itself, and from the eternal source of life the process begins all over again. Finn and the Heroes are reborn and another cycle of the Heroic Age returns. Finn's funeral wake is the signal of his rebirth.

In the wake Joyce makes what has been called "his own Altimara Cave drawings of the entire history of the human mind" and yet the wake of human progress can disappear again into night. Like T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, Joyce sees modern life in terms of a vision from which brightness and glory have faded. We are now living in the last phase of what has been a glorious cycle, and the present sordid, dull mediocre society is simply the prelude to anarchy and the break-up of the whole. Even the strange language which Joyce invented in *Finnegans Wake* serve a double purpose. On the hand it is an attempt to capture the unity that lies behind the apparent diversity of Western tongues, and on the other it suggests, by the absence of a universally comprehensible language and set of symbols, the senselessness of life, since it has lost the power to communicate itself and is ready for the end. The end which is, after all, the beginning. The last passage of *Finnegans Wake*, which is quoted in full, gives

expression to this fundamental idea of the great unending cycles of life, and the last words are completed only by the opening sentence of the book.

> But you're changing, acoolsha, you're changing from me, I can feel. Or is it me is? I'm getting mixed. Brightening up and tightening down. Yes, you're changing, sonhusband, and you're turning, I can feel you, for a daughterwife from the hills again. Imlamaya. And she is coming. Swimming in my hind-moist. Diveltaking on me tail. Just a whisk brisk sly spry spink spank sprint of a thing theresomere, saultering. Satarella come to her own. I pity your oldself I was used to. Now a younger's there. Try not to part! Be happy, dear ones! May I be wrong! For she'll be sweet for you as I was sweet when I came down out of me mother. My great blue bedroom, the air so quiet, scarce a cloud. In peace and silence. I could have stayed up there for always only. It's something fails us. First we feel. Then we fall. And let her rain now if she likes. Gently or strongly as she likes. Anyway let her rain for my time is come. I done me best when I was let. Thinking always if I go all goes. A hundred cares, a tithe of troubles and is there one who understands me? One in a thousand of years of the nights? All me life I have been lived among them but now they are becoming lothed to me. And I lothing their little warm tricks. And lothing their mean cosy turns. And all the greedy gushes out through their small souls. And all the lazy leaks down over their brash bodies. How small it's all! And me letting on to meself always. And lilting on all the time. I thought you were all glittering with the noblest of carriage. You're only a bumpkin. I thought you the great in all things, in guilt and in glory. You're but a puny. Home! My people were not their sort out beyond there so far as I can. For all the bold and bad and bleary they are blamed, the seahags. No! Nor for all our wild dances in all their wild din. I can see meself among them, allaniuvia pulchrabelled. How she was handsome, the wild Amazia, when she would seize to my other breast! And what is she weird, haughty Niluna, that she will snatch from my ownest hair! For 'tis they are the stormies. Ho hang! Hang ho! And the clash of our cries till we spring to be free. Auravoles, they says, never heed of your name! But I'm loothing them that's here and all I lothe. Loonely in me loneness. For all their faults. I am passing out. O bitter ending! I'll slip away before they're up. They'll never see. Nor know. Nor miss me. And it's old and old it's sad and old it's sad and weary I go back to you, my cold father, my cold mad father, my cold mad feary father, till the near sight of the mere size of him, the moyles and moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and

> I rush, my only, into your arms. I see them rising! Save me from those therrble prongs Two more. Onetwo moremens more. So. Avelaval. My leaves have drifted from me. All. But one clings still. I'll bear it on me. To remind me of. Lff! So soft this morning ours. Yes. Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair. If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he'd come from Arkangels, I sink I'd die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There's where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far call. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousendsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the

In such writing Joyce practices a suble synaesthesia, an interplay of the senses, for the words the reader sees are not the words he will hear. As for words themselves they are storehouses of all experience past and present and in their dynamic aspect they hold the future as well. Through words with their complex, multiple associations, the linguistic record of historic changes, Joyce attempts to communicate a sense of simultaneity. He summons all meaning to judgment before a verbal Apocalypse.

It is difficult to assess the ultimate value of Joyce's idiosyncratic contribution to the novel or to assign him a place in the literary pantheon. That his work is the produce of unmistakable genius is beyond dispute: Poetic lyricism metaphysical wit, impish humour and keen philosophical perceptions are all to be found in a prose style that at times, as in the descriptions of Anna Livia Plurabelle, the river of life, is instinct with a strange and disturbing beauty.

As an innovator Joyce is unparalleled in the range of his achievement. Yet for all that it is impossible not to feel a certain hollowness at the core of his creation; his conception is epic, but he has failed to find an adequate dramatic issue to express it and his tragedy of the human soul revolves, in the final analysis, around a schoolboy jest—a baroque monument to the comic intellect fashioned by a brilliant but sterile verbal wit. He had great gifts of introspection, encyclopedic erudition, a subtle ear, and a necromantic power over words and the ability to synthesize experience in an age of cross-currents and disorder, but he lacked most of the more obvious qualities needed to give great delight in fiction. The castle he

built is full of rich treasures, but the average reader of novels is as yet hardly likely to undertake the perilous journey to reach it.

Finnegans Wake is the most experimental and original novel ever written; it may prove a literary *cul-de-sac* to be immortalized along with *Gagrantuaand Pantagruel* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, or it may eventually lead to the creat on of an entirely new literary art, in which poetry and prose are fused into a new language, richer in suggestive power and subtle denotation, which will provide the means of revitalizing fiction yet once again in its long history. A turning-point in literary history or a thesis writer's paradise—only time can decide.

The Nineteen Forties and After

DURING THE Second World War and the years immediately following, there was little creative ferment. No new reputations were made to match those gained after the First World War by James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster. The successful novels of the nineteen forties were written by authors already well established. The explanation for this lay in the war itself. A total war which absorbed the energies of society to a greater extent than any other in history left no time for creative thought or philosophic reflection. Life was both disorganized and regimented. For people involved in the struggle, objective analysis and detachment were impossible. Potential writers were either directly engaged in action, caught up in the propaganda machine or sent to man the innumerable ministries created by the war effort. Even the non-combatant did not escape. He found himself organising civil-defence or fire-watching. Nor was the world of childhood immune. Some children were sent overseas to safety; others, especially those from the poorer parts of London, were evacuated to the country. The consequences of this national upheaval were considerable, but more so in the world of social reform than in the world of art. Oddly enough, the alien experiences did not inspire novelists to write about them. For most people there was every inducement either to forget as quickly as possible or to work for a different England—the England of the Welfare State and the bloodless social revolution of 1945 to 1951.

The best writing during the war years is to be found not in novels but in documentaries, biographies and prisoner-of-war escape stories, while the English novelists who did continue to write did not draw their subject matter from the war.

If the actual experiences of the war failed to excite the creative imagination, the intellectual climate immediately after proved even less favourable. Travel was limited by currency restrictions. Europe was divided by the iron curtain, and the war-time allies, America and Russia, separated by irreconcilable ideologies. Frontiers were closed, and the international liberalism of the 'twenties was replaced by people's republics,

treason trails, witch hunts and the ubiquitous secret police. Young writers, shut up in England all through the war years, found themselves confronted by a Europe plaughed up by war and largely inaccessible due to international disputes. This hazardous epoch was brilliantly satirized by Evelyn Waugh in *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1949). In the Far East nationalism was triumphant and eastern people, eager to shoulder the white man's burden, were more interested in engineers than in writers in search of the exotic. For better or for worse, the world was a very different place for the successors of Norman Douglas, Aldous Huxley and Somerset Maugham.

At home the privations of the war years survived as the disciplines required to build a Welfare State. Life for most people was dull and monotonous ; their sole consolation was to believe that somehow it was all for the best.

In such circumstances it was inevitably the older writers who continued to dominate literature, notably such novelists as Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, C. P. Snow, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell and L. P. Hartley. None of these was an experimenter in form and none was interested in Joyce's tragi-comedy of linguistics. On the whole they were insular in outlook and interests, and the work of such compelling European novelists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Romain Gary and Alain Robbe-Grillet went unheeded.

Before considering the work of the major writers, mention, perhaps, should be made of the one novelist to follow in the Joyce tradition. In 1939 Flann O'Brien's *At Swim—Two—Birds* was published. Largely ignored at the time of publication, it was re-issued in 1960 when its sheer verbal brilliance and comic inventiveness won for it some esteem. Allying Beckett's eccentric characterisation to a Joycean skill in puns, it tells the story of a man in Dublin engaged in writing a novel about another man who is a novelist. The latter has created a group of characters intent on leading their own lives. By the device of keeping their creator in a drunken stupor, they outwit him and live in blameless virtue contrary to the novelist's intentions. *At Swim—Two—Birds* is a minor comic masterpiece by reason of its originality, wit and rich use of language. The light-hearted debt to James Joyce is amply repaid.

Ivy Compton-Burnett, a novelist of the pre-war world,

continued to display an undiminished talent for depicting English middle class family life. Indifferent to the contemporary scene, Miss Compton-Burnett produced a series of novels in her special idiosyncratic style of dialogue. *Parents and Children* appeared in 1941 to be followed by *Elders and Betters* (1944) ; *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947) ; *Two Worlds and Their Ways* (1949) : *A House and Its Head* (1951) : *Mother and Son* (1955) : *A Father and His Fate* (1957) : and *A Heritage and Its History* (1959). The quaint titles recall the lost world of her Victorian childhood. Focussing her imagination on the narrow field of family relationships she had made uniquely her own, she confessed : "I do not feel I have any real or organic knowledge of life later than 1910. I should not write of later times with enough grasp or confidence." Yet the secret of Compton-Burnett's power lies precisely in these self-imposed limitations. She writes in the tradition of the Henry James of *The Awkward Age* and shows a subtle insight into human relationships and family psychology. Her novels, like those of James, move to a moment of revelation. When it comes, it is then seen to have been carefully prepared for by an elaborate verbal structure composed of gnomic utterances and ambiguous allusions.

Although family life had been much changed since Victorian times, it remained for her the chief source of inspiration. She explored a vanishing world where family ties exert their tyranny and engender secret hatreds. Her novels show, not only her uncommon insight into human motives, but a special gift for reproducing the nuances of speech that distinguish different age groups and different social classes. Her characters, drawn mainly from upper-middle-class families, are outwardly respectable and conformist, while inwardly tormented by demons. Adultery, suicide, illegitimacy, murder, even incest, are among the skeletons jostling about in their cupboards.

To portrary the conflicts and antagonisms within the family group, Ivy Compton-Barnett created a multi-dimensional dialogue. The story is told entirely through conversation ; there is no description, and only occasional references to exits and entrances reveal a change in the grouping. Overheard asides and the retorts provoked by them bring the inbred hatreds, jealousies and fears into focus. Seemingly casual utterances and innocent remarks at the breakfast

table—her favourite locale—serve to release powerful emotional tensions. Silences are particularly significant, and the reader who becomes attuned to her style finds it both felicitous and exciting.

Her characters live in large country houses set in somewhat vague and nebulous territory. They have servants and governesses; no one has to earn a living, yet life is more leisured than lavish. An atmosphere of reluctant economy prevails; neighbours may drop in but there is no formal entertaining. Despite the spacious setting the society is essentially bourgeois and unexpansive. Life within doors is passed in interminable conversations.

It is here in this claustrophobic world of the family that Compton-Burnett reveals her genius. The talk is knife-edged, bitter and remorseless; its function is to strip away pretences and to show the truth however shaming. Within the family the characters present carefully contrived appearances. These are their *personae*: the faithful wife; the prudent kindly husband: the loving son devoted to his mother, loyal to his father. Behind these masks they deceive themselves as effectively as they deceive each other. Hypocritically concealed are the real selves, grasping, mean and hostile. Then, under the stress of some unexpected happening, an unwelcome discovery, an intrusion from a forgotten past, the mask is torn off and they are forced to see themselves as they really are and to know that this is how others see them.

In her concern for the truth about people, Compton-Burnett recalls the Ibsen of the later plays. Each novel contains a key situation in which the moment of truth occurs. Leading up to it and commenting on it are the groups of observers who act somewhat in the manner of a Greek chorus. These "choruses" are sometimes provided by servants with their malicious observations, sometimes by children who citicise their elders ruthlessly, and sometimes by governesses, gentle but without illusions. When caught up in their misdemeanours the chief characters either brazen it out or take refuge in self-conscious platitudes. Yet the final impression left by her novels, despite the obvious comedy in them, is one of personal tragedy. The drama of self-knowledge has to be played out, and played before the most critical of audiences, until the end. There is no escape from exposure.

Among English novelists Ivy Compton-Burnett occupies a

unique position. Her strength lies in her artistry, the unremitting urge to achieve perfection of form in her chosen medium. Her plots are developed with subtle cunning; her spare, colourless prose is instinct with mordant wit and dry humour. A lambent intelligence is everywhere displayed. And her characters, despite their apparent remoteness, are extraordinarily life-like; the little world of the family becomes in her hands a microcosm. Like that of Jane Austen her work has the timelessness of classical art, and will continue to be read when so many purely "contemporary" writers have been forgotten. It is possible too that the literary *pointillisme* of Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras and Robbe-Grillet in France may owe something to her austere methods of depicting people and situations.

Aldous Huxley who, like W. H. Auden, left England just before the war, added to his reputation as a satirist by the publication in 1949 of *Ape and Essence*. As the years passed Huxley saw the fulfilment of many of the prophecies recorded in *Brave New World*. He enumerated some of them in *Brave New World Revisited* (1959), notably the increasing scientific control of human life, growing mechanisation and the withering up of spiritual values in the drive for material well-being. Huxley is obsessed by the failure of the human psyche to resist urges that it clearly recognises as harmful. *Ape and Essence*, a typical Huxley indictment of society, is presented in the form of a film script depicting the rediscovery of America in A.D. 2108 by a group of New Zealanders, survivors of an atomic war. Society in America, they find, has reverted to the mental superstitions of A.D. 900; man is dehumanised, intelligence divorced from feeling, and all natural sexual affection is perverted. Women are "vessels of unholiness", men "prurient apes." The regimentation necessary to survival has proved fatal to humanity. In this somewhat sketchy novel inspired by his fears for the "future, Huxley's old loathing of the body and his fondness for scatology find free play. At the end there is a suggestion, through the revolt of the hero, that human love is the one force that can transform and regenerate mankind. A similar conclusion was reached by Orwell in his novel *1984*, published in the same year.

The Genius and the Goddess (1955), less a novel than a short story, carried Huxley's exploration of the eternal dilemma

between flesh and spirit a stage further. By his choice of theme Huxley appeared to be exorcising the demon that had long tormented him and in doing so comes to terms with the flesh. Ostensibly it describes a love affair between Rivers, a scientist, and Katy, the wife of a man whose pupil he has been. Rivers, typical of a long line of Huxley male characters, "a Pharisee with a sense of inferiority, a prig who secretly envied the people of whom he disapproved," has spent his whole life in self-conflict, spirit against matter, reason against passion, mind against body. Katy, the goddess, is neither promiscuous like Lucy Tantamount, nor an inhibited puritan like Marjorie Quarles, nor yet a romantic illusionist like Rosy in *Antic Hay*. Through an act of unpremeditated union with her, adulterous by the conventions of society, Rivers finds the wholeness that has eluded him. Katy who has exhausted herself in caring for her sick husband finds her vitality renewed by the act of love. The hard and fast rules of life are not applicable in the realm of human emotion. Rivers comes to see his former inhibitions and prejudices in a new light: his compulsive chastity no longer as a sign of his human superiority to the animal nature but as a denial of his true humanity. "I had betrayed my master, but if I hadn't, my master would probably be dead. Evil had been done but enormous good had come of it."

In *The Genius and the Goddess*, slight as it is, Huxley breaks new ground and for the first time in his work an act of sexual love is seen as a positive and absolute good. Yet the latent puritan in Huxley is not entirely overcome, for Katy dies horribly in a car accident.

Among the many excellent brief satires published in this period were Evelyn Waugh's *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1949) and *The Loved One* (1948). The latter is a grimly entertaining study of Whispering Glades, the cemetery in California where morticians are employed to beautify the dead and all the resources of modern advertising are used to "sell" eternity. *The Loved One* has the polished brilliance and caustic ferocity of Waugh's early satires. In his three war books *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961), Waugh reveals his romantic obsession with the past and the chivalric conceptions of honour inseparable in his own mind from medieval Catholicism. His hero, Guy Grouchback, contemptuous of the

shabby, depreciated currency of behaviour accepted by contemporary society, finds himself out of place in the modern world. Waugh shows how a scrupulous sense of honour can, today, lead only to self-frustration.

The "Waugh tradition" seems likely to be maintained by Waugh's son, Auberon, whose first novel, *The Foxglove Saga*, appeared in 1960 when he was twenty. Vaguely reminiscent of his father's *Decline and Fall* it relates the adventures of Martin Foxglove and his friends at school, and in the army. Martin exploits his charm and family connections to get through life effortlessly leaving others, particularly his friends, to suffer for his own follies and misdeeds. The book resolves itself into a series of episodes designed to show the cruelty and stupidity of institutionst—he army, the law, and the world of the mental home. The scenes in the asylum were obviously drawn from Evelyn Waugh's own experiences of one described in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957). The people who work in them are not wilfully cruel but their obtuseness causes more suffering than deliberate malice. Martin's mother, Lady Foxglove, a female Tartuffe, is a cleverly depicted if somewhat exaggerated character, and her encounters with an amateur blackmailer are entertaining.

Written to the formula that proved so successful in his father's *Decline and Fall, A Handful of Dust* and *Vile Bodies*, Auberon Waugh's first novel, however, lacks the sparkle of his father's early work. It reflects a world more drab, more regimented, where disillusionment takes refuge in cynicism.

A writer whose work gained greater recognition in the 'forties and 'fifties was George Orwell. Until the publication of *Animal Farm* in 1945, Orwell was best known as a novelist in the tradition of George Gissing. In a series of rather low-toned documentary novels such as *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), and *Coming Up for Air* (1939), depicted the difficulties, the emptiness and squalor of life among the working classes. A reformer by nature, Orwell lacked the imaginative power to fire his work with greatness. Despite their sincerity and sense of purpose, these early novels are uninspired.

Orwell wanted to work for a better world and he believed this could best be achieved through socialism. In 1935 he went to Spain but his experiences in the Civil War (recorded

in *Homage to Catalonia*), destroyed any belief he might have had in Communism. Life, he found, was too complicated to be easily changed by political formulas. The knowledge so gained helped to free him from the bitterness that had characterised his earlier work, while his distrust of slogans and propaganda was further deepened by the Second World War. The ending of the uneasy alliance between Russia and the West after the war gave him the idea for his political allegory, *Animal Farm*.

The appearance of this fable, so reminiscent in its deceptively simple style of Bunyan and Swift, was well-timed and its success enormous. An epitaph on wasted idealism, *Animal Farm* is authentic satire full of a profound sense of pity for human beings. The central situation depicting the revolt of the animals against the farmer, the introduction of a communal state and its betrayal by the power-greedy intellectuals, was interpreted as an attack on Stalinism. Orwell selected his animals with obvious felicity : Molly, the pony, with her bourgeois love of finery who deserts the cause for ribbons and lumps of sugar ; Boxer, the carthorse, whose simplicity and honest strength are cruelly exploited by the intellectuals ; the pigs, who with their leader Napoleon betray the revolution and restore the human masters. The recurrent tragedy of betrayal is aptly summed up in the chief tenet of the revolution: "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

A further satire *1984* followed in 1949 and was inevitably compared with Huxley's *Ape and Essence*. Orwell was dying of consumption when he wrote it, and the book exudes a sense of despair and hopelessness. In *1984* England, known as *Airstrip I*, is engaged in continuous warfare. The population is controlled by four ministries named ironically *Truth, Love, Peace* and *Plenty*. A new language, Newspeak, is invented "to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits of Ingsoc (English Socialism up-to-date)." The word "free" still exists in Newspeak but only in such statements as "this dog is free from lice" or "this free field is from weeds." It is no longer used in its old sense of politically free or intellectually free, since "political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts and were therefore of necessity nameless." In a society so organised Winston Smith, a humble clerk, attempts rebellion. Betrayed and

imprisoned he finds himself forced to betray the girl whose love had first inspired him to rebel. Yet she, he learns, has already betrayed him. Orwell's *1984* reflected popular notions of future warfare. Even thought was no longer private and nothing escaped the notice of Big Brother, the sinisterly benevolent dictator. Orwell, a liberal idealist who feared bureaucracy and regimentation, was so depressed by his visions of the future that he vowed shortly before his death in 1950 to leave political controversy and return in his next novel to the study of human relationships.

The discontent with contemporary society that prompted Huxley to write *Ape and Essence* and Orwell *1984* may have inspired Percy Wyndham Lewis to attempt the completion of his fantastic satire on modern man which was begun in *The Childermass* (1928). This work described by a contemporary as 'a cromlech of acrostics" commemorated a literary feud between Lewis and James Joyce. Many years later the second and third parts, *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*, were published together as *The Human Age* (1956). Lewis obviously intended to write a fourth and final part ending with an Apocalypse and Last Judgment, but his death in 1957 interrupted the project and the work remained unfinished or, at any rate, unpublished.

The action of *The Childermass* takes place in the world of the dead, a world of ex-human beings. angels, fallen and unfallen together with the misbegotten offspring of the two. Pullman, an intellectual sophist and his former fag, Sattherwaite, the perpetual adolescent, meet after death in a desolate place called the Camp. Beyond the Camp is a river on the other side of which stands the Magnetic City, mistakenly believed to be Heaven. An official, the Bailiff, comes to the Camp to interview candidates for admission to the City but the principle of choice is never revealed.

Much of *The Childermass* consists of a prolonged debate between the Bailiff, a liberal agnostic philosopher, and his adversary Hyperides, a neo-Fascist Greek. The latter apparently stands for the classicism, reason, order and authority approved by Lewis against the Bailiff, whose liberalism is condemned as sentimental and decadent. Much of the Bailiff's discourse reads like a parody of a Joycean monologue and towards the end lapses into the incomprehensible. Pullman and Sattherwaite succeed in slipping into the Magnetic City,

and with their arrival the second part of the trilogy. *Monstre Gai*, begins.

The City, rather like London in appearance, is not. however, the expected Paradise but "a sub-celestial system about to be destroyed by infernal agency." The place is at once familiar and yet sinister, apurgatory run by the Devil's party, and things happening there have a mysterious compulsion. The key to Lewis's satire is to be found in Lucifer's appeal to the modern intellectual : "the good and bad are blurred, are they not in the modern age. We no longer see things in stark black and white. We know all men are much the same. An amoralist—such is the modern man." Pullman, lacking an inner core of faith, succumbs to the Bailiff's seductive flattery, deserts his God-fearing friends and makes contact with "the other side" which is intent on betraying the City.

At this point in the story the celestial powers exert themselves to prevent the total subversion of the inhabitants. White angels appear in the sky, earthquake frequencies increase and a vast eye is focussed on the City observing every action. As the atmosphere of hysteria grows more intense and frightening, the Bailiff accompanied by Pullman and Sattherwaite leaves the Third City for Matapolis the capital of Hell.

Malign Fiesta, the third part of *The Human Age*, evokes a horror of life as Wyndham Lewis, whose fury was roused at the sight of intelligence baffled by stupidity, perceived it. Suspense is maintained and the climaxes are well contrived. The plot unfolds with the urgency of a detective story. A stupendous drama of supernatural evil is being played out in a world of human motives and political passions. Wyndham Lewis's Satan, the Lord Sammael, a compound of Ivan Karamazov's philosopher and Gogol's weary devil who longs to come to terms with God, replaces the Bailiff who in this part of the narrative degenerates into a buffoon. Pullman, by now thoroughly frightened by the sinister happenings, becomes the confidant of the Lord Sammael and shows himself more expert in devilry than his master.

A great part of *Malign Fiesta* is taken up with the description of the Haus Europa, a modern inferno reminiscent of a war-time concentration camp. Finally, Sammael decides to annihilate Heaven by liquidating Hell. "He was now arranging for the contamination of the angel nature, for the destruction of something which had endured from the beginning of

time. He was going to mix it up with the pettiness and corruption of mankind." To this end he arranges a fiesta during which the angelic beings are to be seduced by the now unspeakably degraded daughters of men. At a moment of crisis, Heaven launches a direct attack on Matapolis, and the novel ends abruptly and inconclusively as Pullman and Sattherwaite are carried off to appear, presumably, at the Last Judgment.

In *The Childermass*, Lewis had satirised the intellectual and literary cults of the 'twenties. In *Monstre Gai*, he focussed his attack on decadent liberalism with its toleration of mediocrity, homosexuals and cretinous adults. *Malign Fieste*, with its vision of perverted scientific experiments and human degradation, was obviously influenced by the horrors of the Second World War. Lewis seized upon those aspects of the human age which contrast most violently with the heroic and the divine.

Essentially melodramatic, *The Human Age* draws excitement from its strange mingling of the supernatural and the human and from the sharp visual details, often monstrous and sinister, that illustrate the struggle between good and evil. Sattherwaite, shrewd yet gullible, equally at home in Purgatory and Hell, may represent the average man who contemplates with good-humoured stupidity the tragedy enacted around him. Pullman, a sophisticated intellectual, typifies the false clerk, the Judas of the modern world, who has betrayed religion, morality and justice.

Theologically, *The Human Age* is as abstract and unsubtle as Bunyan's *Holy War* and far less lucid. The evil that corrodes society remains undefined while Lewis lashes out at his pet aversions—namely, youth cults, cretins, liberalism, relativity, homosexuals and women. His attitude to sex is confvsed and contradictory. While appearing to condemn homosexuality, he is equally hostile to women. No normal human relationships or natural joy are depicted in this carnival of diabolism. This possibly is the great weakness in Lewis. Significant satire implies the existence of standards, but instead of a powerfully integrated system of belief, Wyndham Lewis offers the spectacle of dynamic energy expending itself in futile violence against a limited range of social evils.

The Human Age was acclaimed by many critics, T. S. Eliot among them, as a masterpiece. This modern allegory, the

Pilgrim's Progress *de nos jours*, is dramatic in conception; the bizarre events described have a compelling Kafka-like quality and the language is charged with visionary power. Yet the final impression is disappointing. At times the picture is confused, and the constant preoccupation with homosexuality becomes tedious. In the sheer nastiness and ferocity of the Yenery episode there is something repellent suggesting an emotional immaturity that weakens the satiric impact. Swift's *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms* may have inspired Lewis, who, at his best, fuses the human and the supernatural with the same imaginative intensity with which Swift related the worlds of men and brutes, and with like effect.

Moral evil is the subject of *Lord of the Flies* (1954), a first novel by a new writer, William Golding, a young schoolmaster. The subject, darkness in the human heart, is made even more horrible by the fact that the characters in the novel are children, young ones at that. Wrecked on a desert island without succour or adult guidance, a group of schoolboys take over a natural paradise and turn if gradually into a hell. Rejecting friendliness, co-operation and good counsel, they split into two groups. The ringleaders of one ate potent for mischief and curelty while the others grope blindly towards a better ordering of things. Open conflict results and with it comes a relapse into barbarism. There at the level of childhood, with arrows, passwords, clay daubings and eerie battle cries, the tragedies of the adult world are re-enacted. To the natural terrors of the unknown tropical island are added the worse horrors of human wickedness. Original sin destroys the garden of innocence. *Lord of the Flies* impresses by the sheer quality of the writing; the fresh, vivid metaphors build up a textual richness. Golding gets his effects by use of words chosen for their pictorial value or their strange distrubing sense of movement. Particularly striking is his power to communicate the terror in the human heart before the unknown in nature, and the all too clearly discernible cruelty in man. Certain descriptions—the pig hunt, the discovery of the dead airman, the bestial killing of Simon—are unforgettable. The final nightmare scene is ended abruptly by the arrival of a rescue ship, yet there is no sense of relief since the darkness revealed in the human heart leaves little hope for the future.

His second novel, *The Inheritors* (1955), is a study of Neanderthal man at a time when this primitive innocent

animal being, baffled and defeated, was forced to yield to a superior, more intelligent, yet corrupted, race. The technical feat of writing a novel from the point of view of a people to whom a logical sequence of thought was not natural is accomplished with skill. Neanderthal man thought in pictures and by conditioned memory, while the men who succeed him are self-conscious and reflective. To Golding this conceptual power, this ability to meditate, to become aware of self, presents itself as an aspect of human guilt. Loss of innocence is the price of knowledge and the development of human consciousness. Yet while Golding's power to create past modes of thinking and feeling is impressive and interesting, *The Inheritors* is a difficult book, less compelling and readable than its predecessor.

As a *tour de force* his third novel, *Pincher Martin* (1956), was a remarkable achievement. By his discription of a moment of expanded consciousness in a drowning man who, at the point of death, struggles against God, Golding presents yet another facet of the guilt and retribution theme. In the tortured intensity of his struggle, Pincher Martin becomes a symbol of man's primal Fall. The drowned man is a self-centred creature greedy for life and indifferent to any claims beyond his own desires. His purgatory after death is to be chained to the rock of his own hated but inescapable self. If the novel fails, it is perhaps through Golding's inability to make his image universal and to relate Pincher Martin's experience after death to a convincing philosophy.

A fourth novel, *Free Fall*, which appeared in 1959, was Golding's first essay in social fiction. The action is set in the twenty years before the Second World War. Sammy Mountjoy, born in a Kentish slum, and adopted by a homosexual rector, grows up, seduces one girl and marries another, becomes a Communist then quits the party, takes up art and finally goes to the war. Sammy tells his story in a series of flashbacks, reminiscent of talks on a psychiatrist's couch, in an attempt to discover the moment when he first sinned, and so fell from Grace and lost the innocence which was the original state of man.

In its theme of guilt and retribution and the use of confession, *Free Fall* recalls *La Chute* of Camus but it lacks the concentration and intellectual strength of the French novel. Golding is less deeply committed than Camus. Mountjoy's

experiences are banal as well as sordid and his quest through memory for his lost innocence is curiously unmoving.

Considerable interest was aroused in the nineteen forties by the novels of Graham Greene, a convert to Catholicism. In the 'thirties Greene had impressed the critics with a series of psychological thrillers inspired by themes of violence, murder, suicide and betrayal. The best of them, *Brighton Rock* (1938), was distinguished by its strong sense of characterisation and brilliant staccato style of writing. Greene's acceptance of Catholicism was the turning point in his literary career. It shifted his focus of interest from the struggle of man against society, against the police, against the gang, to man and his conscience involved in the ultimate struggle with God. Certain situations in which obedience to God conflicted with natural human desires, fascinated him. As a writer he was closer in spirit to the Frenchmen Mauriac and Bernanos than to his predominantly agnostic English contemporaries.

Before the war he was sent to Mexico to report on a religious persecution taking place there, out of which experience came *The Power and the Glory*, published in 1940. The novel tells the story of a whisky priest, with a natural daughter, during the persecution. The man recognises his worthlessness and feels that in setting such a bad example he has failed his God. All around him his fellow priests have been shot and there is a price on his own head. Mistaken for a bootlegger he is imprisoned, but about to escape, when his duty as a priest forces him to stay to hear a woman's confession. As a result he is betrayed and shot. But in spite of everything—his drunkenness, his sexual sin—he has in the end been true to his God, and his martyrdom is not in vain, for a boy who has seen him die before the firing squad finds the courage to support the persecuted faith and aids his successor. Among outcasts and desperadoes, in the defth of human foulness and treachery, God is vindicated. The atmosphere peculiar to Greene's later novels is first revealed in *The Power and the Glory*. Beauty, truth and goodness are deliberately excluded; with the emphasis falling on vice, squalor, furtiveness, the cheeply sensational and all that is brash and vulgar. What Graham Greene is trying to drive home is the significance that Christ died for a world that is, at best, disgusting. "It was too easy to die for what was good and beautiful, for home or children, for civilisation—it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and corrupt."

Few contemporary novelists have so faithfully depicted the outer squalor and slovenliness that accompany inner degradation. Graham Greene never gilds vice. His characters inhabit a shabby seedy world without heroism, but "even if it were all untrue—if there was no God—surely life was happier with the enormous supernatural promise than with the petty social fulfilment, the tiny pension, and the machine-made furniture. Far better Hell, sin and damnation, than the drug store and the Coca-Cola, the hamburger and the graceless, sinless, empty, chromium world."

The Heart of the Matter (1948), set in the steamy heat of West Africa, is a story of sexual sin and damnation. Scobie, a tired middle-aged man, Deputy Commissioner of Police, becomes a Catholic in order to marry a devout Catholic woman. Honest and just, he is the incorruptible man in a corrupt environment. His wife despises him as a mediocrity and a failure, and he dreads retirement since life with her will be so empty When she wants to go to South Africa for a holiday, Scobie, knowing full well that he cannot afford it, tells her to go and borrows the needed money from a rascally Syrian trader. Soon the honest man is caught up in a web of corruption. While his wife is away Scobie befriends a young girl, Helen, who has recently lost her husband in a shipwreck, barely escaping with her own life. They fall in love and find happiness together, but the conflict between his love and his faith, his sin and his inability to expiate it, prove too much for him. When his wife, having got wind of the affair, returns unexpectedly and insists that he attend Holy Communion with her, Scobie faces defeat. All he can do to escape mortal sin is to kill himself. He does it in such a way as to make it look like natural death. Here again the theme is the conflict in the soul between an illicit love and a religion that admits no compromise with the world of the flesh. *The Heart of tee Matter* is a well-written and in some ways a brilliant book. The style is taut and spare and in the story moves evenly as the drama unfolds. The reality of tropical heat, the sweet, the rain beating down on corrugated roofs, the drabness and sense of weariness and decay, the squalid intrigues of the natives and the spiritual agonies of the one just man, are powerfully conveyed. Scobie is a character drawn in the round, and few things in the novel are so memorable as the account of his mental anguish when faced by his

wife's insistence that he attend Communion with her.

By comparison, *The End of the Affair*, published in 1951, was disappointing. It lacked the finely controlled organic unity of the earlier work, and the mechanics of the story were less acceptable. The central figure in the book is a woman, ripe for spiritual experience. Two years before the story begins she has had a love affair with a middle-aged novelist, but has ended the relationship suddenly without apparent reason. Attempting to discover what has happened to his former mistress, the novelist comes upon her diary and learns that she still loves him. But believing that he had been killed in an air-raid, she had prayed to God and promised that if he were restored to life she would give him up. The novelist tries to persuade her to come back to him, but she falls ill and dies soon after. After persuading her husband to have her cremated, the novelist learns that she was born a Catholic. From this point in the story, Greene invokes a series of miraculous interventions which strain credulity in order to bring about the desired ending. The central episode, however, the finding of the diary, is handled brilliantly, and the struggle between passion and the spirit is honestly examined.

The subject of religion is handled less sympathetically in *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960). Set in a leper colony, the story of a man who has lost his faith is presented with irony. Query, the tragic hero, who is an escapist from life, may well be a self-portrait. The fairy tale he tells to wile away the *nuit blanche*, which is to cost him his life, is symbolic of the artist and his need for suffering. Without suffering he can neither love nor create.

Technically, Graham Greene adds little to the development of the novel. He is a competent craftsman whose plots are cleverly but conventionally unfolded. What distinguishes him is his Catholic concern with sin and damnation in a contemporary society. The theological conflicts of flesh and spirit take on an exciting unexpectedness in the framework of race gangs, bootleggers, colonial administrators, and amid the debris of war-time London. Catholicism allows him full scope to create interesting inner conflicts, to explore the psychological implications of loss of faith, and to probe the moral conscience on many issues that could not arise in an agnostic world. At times this Catholicism seems to be more an effective device for producing dramatic tensions and increasing complexity than a

faith profoundly held. There is something synthetic in the brilliance of these later novels. The strength implied in *The Power and the Glory* expends itself in these later works in characters that are slickly conceived and in situations that become increasingly contrived. Vitality in character drawing gives way to adroit depersonalisation. Greene's Catholicism takes on a masochistic tinge. Invariably his finest characters are the ones who are driven to self-destruction.

Joyce Cary, who died in 1957, was yet another older novelist whose post-war writings enhanced his reputation and brought him wider recognition. His best work is to be found in two trilogies, the first of which comprises *Herself Surprised* (1941), *To Be a Pilgrim* (1942) and *The Horse's Mouth* (1944). In Gulley Jimson, the roistering painter, hero of *The Horse's Mouth*, Cary embodies his conception of genius and of the significance of art. Imbued with a deep sense that the importance of human destiny lies in the earthly embodiment of the creative force, Cary stresses the need for total experience. The divine aspects of human desire are united and reconciled by the artist. He alone expresses the sorrows, conflicts, the inertia and the commonplace joys of life in their minute concrete particulars, and by doing so reveals their meaning. Art alone has the power to clarify the confusion of life, and that, in Cary'e eyes, is its justification. Apart from the philosophy his novels are packed with exciting incidents and richly drawn charaters. A style that is vigorous and concrete is allied to Cary's power to identify himself with the people in his novels and to present them exuberantly and intimately. Although he tends to rely on stock types, such as the eccentric artist, the handsome seducer, the bounder, the muddle-headed but kindly woman with an illegitimate child, the frustrated spinster and so on, they are all drawn from within. Infusing his own experience with that of his central characters, Cary suggests the flow of life as they live it, while he retains the artist's detachment and shows them modified and refined by suffering.

Politics rather than art inspired the second trilogy—*Prisoner of Grace* (1952), *Except the Lord* (1953) and *Not Honour More* (1955)—a series of novels centred on Chester Nimmo, a liberal politician. Nimmo, a bellicose pacifist during the Boer War, becomes a national leader in 1914. Yet no matter how inconsistent he is, Nimmo is always justified in

his ow eyes. His every action is God-inspired. Indeed, Nimmo is so realistically portrayed that he seems part of the actual political history of his day. In him, Cary studied a certain kind of only-on-Sunday Christianity, with its gift for self-deception and power of alloying non-conformist idealism to expediency. Astute and hypocritical, Nimmo believes so utterly in himself that he compels others to accept him at his own valuation

Despite the excellent characterisation, poetic vision and exuberance, Cary's novels tend to disintegrate into shapelessness. At times he seems to lose control of the story by the very intensity with which he becomes involved in the happenings. Unlike most English novelists of this period, Cary was seriously concerned with the meaning behind experience. His love of William Blake reveals his bias towards the metaphysical, and there is something truly Blakean in the episode where Jimson takes the bomb-ruined Church for his canvas and recaptures the splendour of human life in a Dionysian frenzy.

The world of childhood found special expression in the novels of L. P. Hartley. In *The Shrimp and the Anemone* (1944), *The Sixth Heaven* (1946), *Eustace and Hilda* (1947), followed by what is possibly his best book *The Go-Between* (1953) in which he explored with fastidious sensibility the processes of childhood and growing up. Hartley, like Ivy Compton-Burnett, tends to be a writer whose delicate perception and restrained style give him a high place in contemporary English fiction, but whose subject matter is too specialised to appeal widely.

Science fiction is an interesting aspect of the art of storytelling in the twentieth century that may be briefly mentioned (although it can hardly be regarded as literature). This kind of writing, which has gained popularity in the mid-century, brings together the tension of the detective novel, the blood-chilling horrors of the now outmoded ghost story and the ingenuity and excitement of the forgotten Gothic tale. In it the pseudo-scientific takes the place of the pseudo-supernatural.

John Wyndham, the best exponent of science fiction in England shows in his finest work some affinities with the novel of ideas. What mars his work is a failure to create complex characters, a liking for type figures, and a sentimental

taste in happy endings which are often unnaturally contrived. But *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) and *The Chrysalids* (1955) do make exciting reading.

What, however, is more significant than his apocalyptic vision of the power of chaos at work in an everyday world, organised to cope only with the expected and normal, is his philosophy. It allies him with Huxley and Orwell. The threats to man's existence invented by John Wyndham may be seen at two levels: as actual threats by a species having some material superiority over man, or as symbolic threats created from within by man's own evil nature. In *The Day of the Triffids* the effect of chaos in a great capital, London, created by sudden blindness, is worked out logically and remorselessly. All moral principles vanish under the shock, all acquired idealistic values appear as detrimental to survival. The determination of the few, spared from the general tragedy, to maintain themselves at all costs is frighteningly portrayed. Everywhere the law of the jungle asserts itself. Once something happens to sever the restraints imposed by civilisation, man quickly reverts to the beast.

Wyndham is a satirist whose imagination is rooted in an understanding of the interplay of social and economic forces and human ecology. As a writer of science fiction he is, clearly, influenced by H. G. Wells, but he is critical of his master. Wyndham's invaders of man's comfortable, normal world, with the possible exception of the Triffids, are not bent on destroying man as an enemy but are simply engaged in establishing themselves and ensuring their survival by idiosyncratic means that happen to be inimical to human civilisation. In *The Kraken Wakes*, the intelligence beneath the sea melts the polar ice cap for its own purpose and incidentally engulfs London. Significant of John Wyndham's work is the repeated fantasy of the destruction of a world that disgusts him. He hates humanity as it is, but, as he shows in *The Chrysalids*, he has a subtle understanding and much tenderness for the powers latent in man that could be developed.

Here is a writer in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe, Sheridan Le Fanu and Wilkie Collins. Science fiction—perhaps the last refuge of good story-telling—has many clever, ingenious exponents but none shows Wyndham's philosophic bent nor his intelligent grasp of the human situation.

In the middle of the nineteen fifties a new generation of

writers appeared, exponents of a social realism that reflected all that seemed characteristic of the post-war world. The new names in fiction included Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Nigel Dennis, John Braine, Thomas Hinde, Angus Wilson and Iris Murdoch. Together with the dramatist John Osborne and the spinner of theories, Colin Wilson, they seemed most responsive in their various ways to the spirit of the age and they cohered, at least in the eyes of reviewers, into something like a literary movement.

Writing with verve and gusto in a comic vein, they conveyed their impressions of a society as entertaining, if as unrepresentative, as the earlier Wodehouse world of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster. John Wain, Kingsley Amis and John Braine revived the comic tradition in English fiction and did for the nineteen fifties what Evelyn Waugh, Michael Arlen, Aldous Huxley in the novel and Noel Coward in the theatre had done for the 'twenties and 'thirties. The targets for comic satire had shifted. It was no longer the jazz age, bright young things, psycho-analysis, modern art, the Charleston and the gin-drinking, dope-taking commuters between Mayfair and the Cote d' Azur. Instead the comic spirit played around the denizens of the Welfare State who drank cocoa, washed nappies and whose horizons were bounded by the "local" and the kitchen sink. A new social stratum found itself being explored in fiction. Characters were drawn from lecturers in provincial universities, second-rate journalists, library assistants, unsuccessful painters and novelists all very conscious of being "outsides" yet contemptuous of the established social order. In *Hurry On Down*, *Lucky Jim* and *Room at the Top* the new lower-middle class, the world of higher state education with the first generation of scholarship holders, made its debut in the novel. Unsophisticated but shrewd, brash and aggressive, the new heroes were suspicious of learning and frankly hostile to culture. If they had knowledge they concealed it or admitted to it ironically and apologetically. Unlike their opposite numbers in the novels of the 'twenties, they tended to be monogamous, and any erotic adventures they had were apt to be ludicrous or embarrassing or sordid.

This new generation of post-war novelists was harder, more cynical than its predecessors. Fine writing, symbolism, introversion, poetry, polemics were eschewed by writers who drew their inspiration from Smollett and Fielding rather than

from Richardson and Proust. What chiefly characterized them was the attitude of being anti-authority and anti-tradition. Good manners, respect for the past, conventional behaviour were anathema to their characters. The erudite hedonists of Huxley and Norman Douglas were exiled frem fiction and their place taken by picaresque figures, without status or desire for it, who could turn with equal zest from university teaching to window-cleaning, lorry driving or peddling dope. Their impressions of life were recorded simply and directly; they are as impatient of rhetoric as they are of lust and hypocrisy. They represent a generation that had been deceived too often and was on its guard. Larger idealismswere suspect. Their outlook was suburban and provincial; and the only admitted motive for action was selt-interest. These "anti-heroes" regret their university training and careful upbringing since it blunts their edges and makes them defenceless. Neutrality not *engagement* is their goal.

The attitude of the nineteen fitties was clearly articulated in 1954 by Kingsley Amis in *Lucky Jim*, fourteen editions of which appeared in little more than a year. Amis caught the spirit of the post-war period with skill and authenticity. England at the time was full of Lucky Jims recently demobilised, and in Jim Dixon, Amis created a prototype for them, a twentieth-century folk-hero, or rather anti-hero, for they have no use for such cant and humbug as heroism. The plot is revealing. Jim, an assistant lecturer in medieval history at a provincial university, is not intersted in history but wants promotion. Gauche and graceless in speech and behaviour he makes no concessions to convention. As a house guest of his professor, he quarrels with his host's son, gets drunk and sets his bed on fire. In a final effort to ingratiate himself with the Faculty he delivers a lecture but takes too much whisky to steady his nerves and gives instead an unmistakable parody of his chief. He is forced to leave the university, but fortune favours him and he not only gets the job coveted by the professor's son but his girl as well.

Lucky Jim is an excellent comic novel full of entertaining episodes and written in short staccato sentences that suggest energy, high spirits and unflagging power. Yet this alone would not explain its phenomenal success. Jim was more than just a character in fiction He was an embodiment of the *zeitgeist* in England; the new generation in embryo. Like a

child, Jim is utterly truthful and deceives only those who wish to be deceived. When he bluffs his superiors he does it to keep them happy and save himself from criticism. Throughout the book Jim is a precocious grown-up child still in the birth trauma scoring off the adult world. A behaviourist, he reacts to situations without reflection; life has neither pattern nor purpose. What a man becomes depends largely on accident. The Lucky Jims could not be called disillusioned for they have never had illusions. Good humoured, devoid of malice, they are ready enough to forgive and forget, but they refuse to be imposed upon either by ideals or by authority. Theirs is the urchin's approach to life, irreverent but amusing. In *Lucky Jim* Kingsley Amis created the portrait of an intellectual tough and the first "dead-end kid" of modern English literature.

His next novel, *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955), was less funny than its predecessor; but possibly depicts emotional relationships more maturely. The basic pattern of the former novel is repeated. John Lewis, a small-town librarian, gets himself involved in a love affair with the wife of one of the local bigwigs, The affair is merely sensual and Lewis's attitude to it offhand and unsentimental. Although he could use it to advance his career, it threatens to bring unhappiness to his wife and disturb his easy-going domestic existence. Thus when promotion is within his grasp he rejects it, flings up his post in the library and starts life once again as a coal selesman. Life among the working class may prove more genuine than among upper-class philanders and humbugs. Amis writes cleverly and, at times, entertainingly about ordinary people and their banal, humdrum lives, His own attitude to the class conflict in his novels is obscure and the reader is left to provide his own satiric angle. The author presents with documentary faithfulness an exceedingly dull way of life.

I Like It Here (1958), the result of a trip to Portugal on a travelling scholarship (a Somerset Maugham award), is a slighter book. amusing but ephemeral, It does, however, depict the new post-war tourist abroad. This time the folk-hero, Bowen, an ineffectual writer, goes to Portugal for a publisher in order to establish the identity of a novelist. Bowen, xenophobic and provincial loathes travel and can only hope his wife and children will enjoy it. He panics the moment he leaves England, secretly admiring, although outwardly scorning, seasoned travellers with the gift of tongues.

Indifferent to foreign scenery, architecture, history and literature, Bowen reserves his eloquence for the flies and the plumbing. With the inverted snobbery of the *nouveau* intellectual his idiosyncrasy is to play everything down. He disapproves of Fascism but not to the extent of becoming involved in foreign politics. *I Like It Here* is lively and entertaining depending for effect on some excruciatingly funny episodes and the unexpectedly tender, sympathetic study of Bowen's wife and children.

In his next novel, *Take A Girl Like You* (1960), Amis holds a mirror up to the world of modern secondary schools and their staffs. Drink and seduction are the sole interests of his schoolmasters in their spare time and his characters seem disturbingly authentic. Jenny Bunn, the shrewdly innocent girl from the stricter North, is a twentieth-century Pamela intent on preserving her virtue in a lecherous world. There is a Petronian touch in Amis's description of the party given by Julian Ormerod, a flameboyant aesthete, where, during a drunken orgy, Jenny's virtue is finally, if unwittingly, lost to the astute, charming Patrick Standish, the classics master. Amis's comic intelligence reveals itself in clever dialogue, slick characterisation of the men and continuously entertaining inventiveness. Less episodic than its predecessors, the plot is unfolded in moments of well-maintained suspense.

Take A Girl Like You illustrates the contemporary obsession with sex, yet although the behaviour of the characters could provoke contempt and savage indignation in a Swiftian satirist, Amis's attitude to them is equivocal. The sting is taken out partly by touches of sentimental immoralism, partly by good-humoured jocularity and partly by the author's sympathetic understanding of the problems that beset his characters. Society offers them no alternative and there are no real criteria by which their conduct could be condemned. Amis is content to depict their world with disarming neutrality. Yet to set down so unsparingly the way in which large numbers of people live, implies a scathing indictment of society lurking behind the laughter and a sense of pity for the deluded.

Kingsley Amis helped to create a vogue for lively, vigorous satires on aspects of post-war life in England. After a long absence, the comic novel came into its own again.

Associated with the new trend in fiction to blend rabelaisian humour, working-class life and covert criticism of the

established order of things were John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957), and Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958). In these novels a new generation of young men—angry, amused, benign or just indifferent—look back on life. The society depicted is contemporary, devoid of interest in the mind or the spirit but obsessively concerned with the flesh. Money is the sole criterion of success ; no other value is considered worthwhile, although lip-service is continually paid to the traditional virtues. In such a world the new hero is the anti-hero. He is in revolt, opposed to the establishment, but he has no positive beliefs and no aim that transcends the moment.

Two courses are open to him ; either to contract out of society and achieve neutrality or to stay in it, despising it, and cheat, swagger and browbeat his way to the top. Charles Lumley in *Hurry on Down* takes the first alternative, Joe Lampton in *Room at the Top* the second.

Lumley, escaped from the university is a picaresque figure —by turns window cleaner, lorry driver, dope peddler, private chauffeur and night-club bouncer—who finds his final metamorphosis as the key-man in a syndicate that provides jokes for comedians. The work is meaningless and absurdly well-paid. Wealth enables Lumley to get even with the middle class, the established order, which he depises for its meanness, pretentiousness and unreality. His attempts to root himself in the working class have proved unsuccessful. His upbringing, his accent and his education raise insurmountable barriers. Money buys him "neutrality" and sets him free "to break up life into moments and live each moment as if it had no past and would lead to no future."

The incidents in *Hurry on Down*, however lightly sketched and far-fetched, are delightfully humorous. Froulish, the neo-Bohemian whose *atelier* is a disused builder's yard where he lives among packing cases cared for by a blowsy slattern, is almost Dickensian. The scene in which Froulish reads part of his *magnum opus*, a novel without title or theme, to a local literary society, shows a touch of comic genius. It recalls the frolic humour of Ivor Brown's sally of the 'thirties, *Master Sanguine*.

John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) was a harsher and less good-humoured study. A success story with a bitter moral, it received an unexpected boosting by the popular press

doubtless unaware that the intention behind the novel was satiric. As a result it became a best-seller and was quickly made into a film. The hero, Joe Lampton, a working-class lad from the North, has no use for "neutrality." His ambitions include "three guinea shirts, an Aston Martin and a girl with a Riviera sun tan." Joe is tough and lecherous but not without feeling, as his relations with Arice, the woman he loves, show. Women prove for him the best means of getting to the top, and the physical desires that destroyed Hardy's Jude work differently in the modern world. In a society which makes money and respectability its God, Joe finds the short cut to success when he gets the silly, sexy daughter of a rich manufacturer with child. Her father offers him a partnership in the film as the price of marriage. The woman he really loves commits suicide, but nobody blames him. His friends only feel that "she would have ruined his life." Joe knows better. He has got to the top but the price is a loveless marriage and a sense of remorse that no one but himself will ever understand. *Room at the Top* is interesting in its dynamic study of the post-war mentality. It explores the motives of a generation indifferent to culture and untouched by religion. In such a novel the style is at one with the subject, harsh and forthright, but pungent with Braine's shrewd northern humour.

John Wain's *The Contenders* (1958) gave promise of a more serious concern with satire. It showed an advance in construction in that episodic sequences were replaced by a plot that gained momentum from a conflict, a clash of wills between the chief characters. One, an artist, feckless but inspired, the other, a successful industrialist, are tied to each other by the forces of hate and affection. The story of the struggle of the two characters for independence and self-assertion is told by the narrator, a second-rate journalist without ambition or malice, who knows and likes them both.

In its concern with the shoddy values so readily accepted in society, as in the conflicts it describes and in the manner of its telling, *The Contenders* may be compared with the American William Styron's *Set This House on Fire*. But the American has a far surer grip on his narrative, his characters are more interesting, and there is a greater zest and power in setting forth his grotesque story. Common to both novelists is a blending of sheer comedy with an awareness of the black depths in human personality. Both are indictments of a com-

petitive society that outwardly praises but in fact denies the finer impulses in humam nature.

A more abstract approach to personality was suggested by Nigel Dennis in *Cards of Identity*, published in 1955, yet another satire on contemporary society. There are hints both of Pirandello's characters and Ben Jonson's trio of rogues in *The Alchemist* in this novel devoted to exposing the dangers that threaten man with the breakdown of the time-honoured inviolability of human personality. Now however, psychology has replaced alchemy as a hunting ground for conference tricksters and charlatans. New personalities can be created at will and furnished with fraudulent identity cards. The story, told with skill and originality, concerns the annual conference of the so-called Identity Club which takes place in a deserted country house. Staff are recuited by modern techniques from the local inhabitants. As few people in the twentieth century have any clear sense of their own identities, it is an easy matter for the expert to deceive them. Patients are hypnotised, browbeaten or simply third-degreed into submission. The methods by which an unsuccessful riding master is so effectively transformed into a bibulous butler and provided with an alcoholic past that his own sister, turned housekeeper, fails to recognise him are both funny and alarming. With the local doctor changed to a gardener and his nurse into his assistant, the house is soon set in order. Oddly enough the victims ate completely at home with their new identities. They even prefer them.

Once the Conference is under way, Nigel Dennis's satire is imaginatively directed against contemporary forms of self-deception. These are presented as three long case histories. The first makes fun of those who "resenting their loss of privilege in the modern world, escape into make-believe." Two harmless but frustrated young men find fulfilment, as Co-Wardens of the Badgeries, in devoting their lives to a defunct medieval ceremony. The climax of their story is the description of a procession in which they guard to the death an imaginary badger whose existence, in the first place, was never more than symbolic. The subject of the second case history is ambiguous sexuality, while the third and the most consistently brilliant concerns a monk, a convert from international Communism, who writes his confessions as a former Communist agent.

Despite its verve and humour *Cards of Identity* carries the disturbing suggestion that human personality is neither stable nor consistent. Identities can be broken down and refashioned at will, while the infinite suggestibility of human beings is as useful to the charlatan as to the dictator.

Among the more notable contributions to contemporary English fiction in the nineteen fifties were the novels of Iris Murdoch, a philosophy don at Cambridge, who tended to be associated in the minds of critics with the novelists of revolt —Wain, Amis and Nigel Dennis. Actually she has little in common with them. Her first novel, *Under the Net* (1955), revealed powers of fancy and imagination that were further developed in *Flight from the Enchanter* published in 1956. Her writing restored to fiction something of the glamour and romantic warmth it had lost to the social realists. Her style is often mannered in its striving for effect, but has a touch of poetry in its metaphors and images. In *Flight from the Enchanter* she exploited a vein of fantasy that verged on the bizarre. Mischa Fox, the enchanter and central character, is at once mysterious and malignant, suggesting, perhaps, a Jungian *animus* figure to Charlotte Bronte's dark, enigmatic heroes in the part he plays in the heroine's life. In this novel with its strange, eerie atmosphere the writing achieves a febrile brilliance which is at its best in the description of Mischa Fox and the account of the heroine Rosa's relationship with the two Poles who are dominated by the macabre personality of their sick mother. Much of the fantasy in his episode is reminiscent of Gogol.

The Sandcastle (1957) has a more conventional setting. The theme is again an obsessive love, this time that of a middle-aged schoolmaster for a young girl painter who brings chaos and suffering as well as ecstasy into his life. Psychological probability replaces fantasy and the development of the novel is well controlled. The best things in the book are undoubtedly the conversations between the schoolmaster and his wife, a woman unsure of herself and destroying through bitterness the very love she tries to preserve. Yet despite some fine passages of penetrating analysis, the total effect of *The Sandcastle* is negative. As in so much contemporary English fiction, the characters fail to grip the imagination and the reader is left indifferent to their fate.

Her next book, *The Bell* (1958), showed a return to the

world of fantasy with a difference. In it an attempt is made to reach out beyond the fanciful to a philosophy: to restore the wholeness of a world divided first by Christianity and then by the reformation. Dora, wife of Paul Greenfield, an art historian, with her joyous, innocent, pagan delight in life, comes with her young friend, Toby Gaske, into the austere world of an Anglican community who have established themselves at Imber Abbey in Gloucestershire. Dora, rather irresponsibly, helps to salvage from the lake an old pre-Reformation bell, which symbolises the happiness religion should, but so often fails, to give. Many of the characters are well-drawn, especially that of Michael, the latent homosexual, whose innocent affection for Toby is turned sour by the spite of a former pupil. The atmosphere, the setting and the descriptions of nature create a strange vibrancy in a book that haunts the memory.

The publication of *A Severed Head* in 1961 caused a stir in literary circles and evoked interest in the writer in countries as unlikely as Russia. By its exciting tensions, unexpected violence, macabre situations and skilful deployment of mystery, *A Severed Head* suggested that the Gothic novel was about to be resuscitated. On the other hand the pattern of human relationships in the story was reminiscent of Restoration Comedy. But, in fact, the characters are not people so much as personifications of the erotic impulses released by the psychologist who is an important figure in the book. As such they obey no moral law, fit into no categories and accept no discipline; they couple freely, even incestuously. Martin, the hero and narrator, provides a clue to the symbolism. A vintner, he represents the Dionysian principle at work in the book transforming reality into fantasies, linking ecstasy and death, love and hate. Finally the laws of sexual attraction and repulsion draw the irresponsible, freedom-loving Martin to Honor Klein, the powerful, oracular Jewess who will enslave and may eventually destroy him.

Her next novel, *An Unofficial Rose* (1962), examimed the problem of freedom and necessity from a different angle. The conventional setting and the human situations reminiscent of woman's magazine fiction belie the novel's philosophical implications. But a moral imperative orders the lives of her characters despite their immoral longings. Caught up in frustrating relationships, they dream of liberation, but when

freedom is offered they are unable to take it. An inner destiny from which there is no escape acts as a barrier; the ties of duty and habit, loyalty and affection prove stronger than the illusory dream.

The abrupt ending of *A Severed Head* suggested that the author had not yet brought about the awaited union of her subconscious fantasies and her rational, philosophic intelligence. Imagination and reason are at war, and the result, at times, is a kind of schizophrenic fiction. Her novels enchant and excite; they point to hidden depths of meaning; but they also at times hint, disconcertingly, that the signposts are will-o'-the-wisps.

Iris Murdoch has wider perspectives than many of her contemporaries; she accepts her position as a cultivated intellectual and writes with engaging seriousness. Her novels, however, lack the compelling force given by a plot of significant action. They have no integrating principle and remain for the most part a series of episodes cleverly strung together. At their best they offer flashes of brilliant wit, and a flair for contriving unusual situations touched with an exotic intensity.

Angus Wilson, a writer of short stories, made a considerable reputation as a novelist in the nineteen fifties. His approach to the novel is that of a moralist, using the story as a means of exposing the shams and evils in society, the vulgarity and meanness and, above all, the cruelty. Angus Wilson shows the influence of George Eliot in his tendency to integrate the story with a moral theme, just as his vivid caricatures and sharply exaggerated types are suggestive of Dickens.

In *Hemlock and After* (1952), Angus Wilson treated the theme of homosexuality in modern society, especially those ambiguities in the ethical codes that help to promote the vices it punishes so savagely. Bernard Sands, a middle-aged novelist of some repute, discovers a latent homosexual tendency in himself. To satisfy a desire that seems to him neither evil nor unnatural, he finds himself drawn into a disreputable, unsavoury underworld inhabited by pimps and blackmailers. Mrs. Curry, the procuress, and her slickly decadent son are brilliantly drawn. Through them and their circle Angus Wilson evokes an atmosphere of corruption and nastiness, memorable for its sinister realism.

Wilson's next book, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), was intended to be impressive. A big-boned, imposing book, it contained an unusually large number of characters for a modern English novel. Their various histories were skilfully related to the main theme, professional integrity. Obviously inspired by the scandal of the Piltdown skull forgery that came to light in 1953, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* describes the finding of a phallic image in the tomb of an Anglo-Saxon saint. Scholars elaborate theories on the historic and religious significance of the find, which suggests that the Christian converts had relapsed into paganism. Proof of the theories depends upon the authenticity of the image. But on this point the integrity of the historian, Gerald Middleton, has silenced all doubts. The plot of the novel turns on the gradual discovery that the image is a fake and was put into the tomb during the excavation. The gradual revelation of the hoax ruins reputations, discredits scholarship and embitters academic rivalries. Gerald Middleton finds his integrity harshly tested.

Angus Wilson does not altogether succeed in making his central character convincing. Middleton is more like an eighteenth-century dilettante than a modern scholar. There is something pasteboard about him. His relations with his wife and family are equally unreal. Possibly, the fault lies in the story itself, which is too slight for the unwieldy superstructure of eccentric scholars and their personal histories it is required to support. Moreover the theme of integrity is not related to any vital issue; the pagan emblem is too remote, too purely academic to arouse a deeper, more general interest. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* lacks the simplicity and passion as well as the strength that comes from deeply felt experience. Despite its length and complexity, it remains a hollow book. Sensibility, acute powers of observation, carefully studied vocabularies are all there, but they are not moved by the springs of significant action, and no fully adequate form is provided for the theme. Like so much contemporary fiction, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* gives the impression of being prefabricated.

Angus Wilson's next novel, *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* (1958), was a study of a happily married woman whose husband dies suddenly during a holiday trip. Still attractive but no longer young, she attempts to save herself from foundering after the shock of her husband's death. Her need to make the psychological and social adjustments to a life in

which her status is no longer assured is analysed sensitively and acutely. Yet again, for all the subtlety and expert handling, the final impression is one of competent transcribing rather than significant literature.

Forming a steady undercurrent in the stream of contemporary fiction was the publication from time to time of chronicle novels, earlier volumes of which had first appeared in the nineteen thirties without winning the recognition enjoyed by the later works. Notable among these sequences, with their many characters and interrelated stories, were C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* and Anthony Powell's *Music of Time*. Doris Lessing deployed her sharp intelligence and fine analytic powers in the *Martha Quest* series, and Olivia Manning observed her world with sensitivity and insight in the promised trilogy beginning with *The Great Fortune*, a novel set in Bucharest just before the war. In the "chronicle" novels brevity, so characteristic of the post-war English novel, gives way to Victorian amplitude. In them there is an attempt to catch the timbre of life, which their authors seem to find incoherent, in a contemporary society devoid of common principles, beliefs or accepted standards. Everywhere there is loneliness, boredom and incomprehension. Against this background, purely personal relationships based on individual likings and dislikings becomes enormously important. No larger issues are involved and ultimate philosophies are deliberately avoided. These novelists attempt to explore the human mind as it concerns itself with day-to-day living. Farce mingles with melodrama and underlying anxiety resolves itself into frivolity and pointlessness. They are all engaged in studying social relationships in the turbulent years leading up to the outbreak of war in 1939, and its consequences. These novelists think in terms of significant generalisation, and by creating characters through whose eyes events are seen, they are able both to describe experiences and to comment on them. It is their concern with commentary and their ampler time-space that distinguishes them from the social realists.

In analysing men and their motives, their ambitions and follies, ethical codes, interest in politics or science or love or art, their eccentricities and their tragedies, and in interpreting them in terms of economic and social pressures, these novelists attempt to do for the middle decades of the twentieth

century what Galsworthy, Musil, Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust (in their respective countries) did for an earlier period.

In 1940, C. P. Snow began a series of novels to be known by the title of its first volume, *Strangers and Brothers*. The narrator, Lewis Eliot, has close affinities with Snow himself. He is "a man who had moved about a good deal among the layers of society and had had the luck to live intimately among half a dozen different vocations." This gives him an expert knowledge of the inner workings of several learned professions, and Lewis Eliot provides a *persona* for his creator whose own experiences enable him to mediate between the reader and the events in the novels.

C. P. Snow was deeply concerned with the split he discerned in modern society between the scientists and the men of letters : "the two cultures" at war with each other. As a writer and a scientist he had, by the fluke of war, "a ringside view of one of the most wonderful, creative periods in all physics." He found, among scientists, optimism, a tremendous sense of urgency and a distinctly meliorist attitude towards society and its future, while the significant literary men were either reactionary like T. S. Eliot and Wyndam Lewis ; at war with material progress, like Aldous Huxley ; or, like Samuel Beckett, found inspiration only in despair. Between the literary intellectual and the scientist a gulf of incomprehension was fixed. Hostility and dislike sprang from a total lack of understanding, so that the intellectual life of Western society was becoming increasingly split into two groups without mutual understanding or toleration.

The sequence of novels in which Snow presented his world included *The Light and the Dark* (1947), *Time of Hope* (1949), *The Masters* (1951), *The New Men* (1954), *The Conscience of the Rich* (1958), and *The Affair* (1960), a sequel to *The Masters*.

The Masters achieved a *succes de scandale* with its unmistakable portaits of well-known Cambridge dons. It is a cold, dry book with the university as a setting for the accont of a feud in a famous college where the Master is dying. The appointment of his successor sparks off secret animosities, jealousy, spite and professional rivalry. As the Fellows intrigue against each other for the coveted honour, clique morality is laid bare. Seen through the eyes of Lewis Eliot, a man familiar with the corridors of power, these

academic figures appear banal and slightly ridiculous. But the academic world of *The Masters* is, after all, a microcosm, and the motives and behaviour of its inhabitants reflect the tough competitive attitudes of the larger world beyond the Common Room. By his bleak style of writing C. P. Snow conveys the wintry chill of characters whose minds and lives are as arid as the subjects they profess.

The Affair, "a paradigm of the political life," takes place in Cambridge sixteen years latter when the College is again divided by a quarrel over a scientist, a "fellow-traveller," who is suspected of having faked a photograph to secure the results he desires. The Seniors' decision to expel him is challenge by two dons who find some evidence to support his innocence. The novel cleverly sets out the motives of self-interest, complacency and personal feelings, embodied in the various characters, that militate against a re-trial and possible reinstatement. Lewis Eliot again is present in this novel as an observer who deflects the emphasis from the purely local to the wider social and political implications of the affair. Although the story is well told and has something of the suspense of a good detective story, the approach to character is behaviouristic. People are seen from the outside, purely in their social contexts. What distinguishes them from one another are physiognomic peculiarities; each is finally caught in a carefully formulated phrase. This, possibly, is the method best suited to depicting men who show little beyond the self-seekingness of those making their way in the world. Finer feelings and subtler understanding would only hamper them.

The New Men had already posited the problem of the conflict in modern society between responsibility, security and patriotism, on the one hand, and scientific ability tainted by communism, on the other. Security in the State is paramount, but the question: "You want me to get rid of my best radio-chemist?" is a difficult one to answer in a world of scientists. Above all, public scandal must be avoided in the public interest. C. P. Snow writes authentically and authoritatively about a world he knows from the inside, but no deeper issues are discussed and the wider philosophic implications of the conflict are ignored. In consequence *The New Men* resembles a brilliant newspaper report of a spy trial, full of exciting tension but with the ultimate meaning of the experience left unexplored.

In *The Conscience of the Rich* (1958), C. P. Snow moved into another social dimension in describing the career of Charles March, the son of a rich Jewish family, and his efforts to free himself from the stranglehold of wealth and obsessive family affection.

Ambition and the forces inherent in characters that further or thwart it provide the motives for the development of events which are set against the background of commerce and policy in the nineteen thirties. Lewis Eliot, in whose perceptions and observations the characters and the story are focussed, reveals a penetrating knowledge of men, but in himself he is a bloodless being, without colour, dull and apt to provoke dullness in others. The touch of passionate intensity needed to sustain interest is lacking, but C. P. Snow's novels do make an important contribution to the social history of their time.

Their weakness comes from depicting a world entirely from without; the characters of Snow's men and women are cleverly and competently caught and thrown on the social screen, but their inner lives remain unrevealed. In this preoccupation with the outward world of appearances, the social customs and attitudes, Snow resembles Dickens. Undoubtedly, to the average reader Snow's vision of society is seemingly a more complete one than Samuel Beckett's "ultimate absolute reality," yet it does not seem to matter so much. Despite its obvious self-importance, the world that C. P. Snow depicts is rather petty and insignificant—a world of shadows and *personae*. Nothing is seen *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Another long series of novels depicting life in the nineteen thirties and forties is Anthony Powell's sequence, to be known when completed as *The Music of Time*. The novels published so far are subtly orchestrated and sophisticated. They are witty, observant and comic in the early Waugh tradition; while less concentrated, less theoretical than Huxley, although sharing Huxley's interest in social aberrations. Powell feels the pulse of life in the middle and upper-middle classes and in the dubious no-man's-land between Society and the Bohemian artistic world that fringes it. Art and Society rather than science and politics are his consuming interests, but, like Snow, he too sees modern society disintegrating under its own inner stresses and tensions. In the Powell country affectation and artistic leanings, promiscuous sexual encounters, and Chelsea and Soho are explored with malicious de-

tachment. Some slight resemblance exists between *The Music of Time* and Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*, a study of Austrian life and enthusiasms prior to 1914. In both, the images of society, disrupting and reforming in the flux of time, are seen in terms of individual destinies. In both, the author seems to be an observer rather than a director of the course of events.

As a writer, Anthony Powell is not easy to place; he belongs to no readily definable school or party. The early novels—*Agents and Patients* (1931), *From a View to a Death* (1933), *What's Become of Waring* (1939)—displayed a talent for comedy both in dialogue and situation, allied to a perceptive sensitivity that recalled Compton-Burnett, but without her feline intensity or tight sense of form.

The dominant theme of *The Music of Time* is the nature of reality in the modern world, as it reveals itself in the contrasting careers of two men, Kenneth Widmerpool and Charles Stringham, who are studied from childhood to maturity. Symbolically they suggest the eternal conflict between matter and spirit. The fruits of the material world can only be plucked by the ruthless, the aggressive, the single-minded victims of success, yet these fruits in the end prove to be but dust and ashes. The more sensitive cannot maintain their values and for them there is ultimately only destruction. Kenneth Widmerpool, clumsy and inept, almost a fool, emerges later as the "self-absorbed man of will on his way to success," whose purely mechanical sense of human relationship involves him in a disastrous marriage and humiliating love affairs. Charles Stringham, the man of imagination, with his immense charm and delicately subdued passions, becomes a self-destructive alcoholic. The narrator of their adventures, Nicholas Jenkins, is the meditative man who discloses himself to the reader by the implications of what he sees, namely "the fundamental dichotomy between the two chief characters whose motives for action are the same as those that underlie all events in the modern world."

In *A Question of Upbringing* (1951), Jenkins is fourteen and the novel covers a period between 1921-1926 when he is at Eton and Oxford making contact with the people who will continue to dominate his life. *A Buyer's Market* (1952) is set in 1928-1929, when Jenkins is in London working for a publisher of Art Books, enjoying a social life, going to dances,

spending week-ends at country houses and watching his friends fall in love and start their careers. In *The Acceptance World* (1955), which covers the course of events for a few months in 1935, the characters of the novel harden into their social *formulae*. Jenkins becomes engaged to a member of the large and immensely complicated and widely ramifying Tolland family. In *At Lady Molly's* (1957) and *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* (1961), the histories of the characters are continued up to the outbreak of the war. Under the disturbing impact of the approaching storm they change: some disintegrate, others move on to new levels of self-importance. Powell paints a lively picture of the Bohemian demi-monde and its amorous intrigues in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*. Here the story centres on Moreland, the musician, and Maclintick, the music critic, whose unexpected suicide points to the "disagreeable possibilities of the world and the fact that the fewer people one involves in it the better." An unheroic conclusion of the uncommitted.

Poussin's "Dance to the Music of Time" provided both the title and the key to a design that would be made explicit as the series of novels was unfolded. In them, "we contemplate the interaction of these brief lives as constituting a loosely woven pattern within which parallels, contrasts, repetitions will occur – sometimes planned by the characters, sometimes not. Its emphasis is on the relation of the dancers to the pattern of the dance. Most people have not the faintest idea of what is going on round them. Their conclusions about life are based on utterly irrelevant and usually inaccurate premises." What Anthony Powell sees in the dance "is the twentieth century as a wrecked civilisation, cavorting along, in the shadow of its greatness." The dance is the dance of death.

Civilisation, as shown in *The Music of Time*, is the process by which society is transformed by people like the upthrusting Widmerpool, whose progressively changing fortunes point to the forces at work in modern history. "In the end most things in life, perhaps all things, turn out to be appropriate, but human affairs are both absurd and sad. Egotism and inhumanity are the symbols of the soul's dark journey." Widmerpool secures his triumphs of prestige and material success only to discover, uncomfortably, that feeling and passion are not, like other things in life, wholly at the command of the will. Stringham destroys himself.

Superficially, *The Music of Time* may invite comparison with *Man Without Qualities* and *A la Recherche du Semps Perdu*, but it lacks depth and a substructure of ideas. The characters represent only themselves ; they are depicted in their minute particulars minus abstraction or theory. More than sixty major characters appear in the novels along with another thirty who make brief appearances and then return to play a more important part in later volumes. Slowly, the characters of the dance take shape in the flux of time ; their impact on each other, determined by their position in the dance, grows sharper ; from the still point of unity two increasingly contrasted movements lead to death. Death either of the spirit or of the body within a decadent society.

The Music of Time shows Anthony Powell's keen perceptions ; his comic gifts ; his powers of building up sustained images that suddenly illuminate his theme ; his sense of human relationships and the ability to communicate a feeling of immediacy, to snatch the reader as it were up into the dance. Yet, despite his skill, Powell's characters are ultimately slight, unmemorable. They are controlled like puppets by their creator ; contrived rather than springing organically from life. It is cleverly done, but not entirely convincing. An image of life as someone might see it, rather than life itself.

The many excellences of English novelists in the mid-century cannot, however, conceal the fact that they are insular, even parochial, in outlook. Whether conventional or bohemian, disillusioned and satiric or sleazy and off-beat, the society they depicted was unadventurous, unconcerned with the larger issues dividing the world. There was no *engagement* ; nothing to equal the deeper, tragic despair of contemporary French fiction or the work of Samuel Beckett with his feeling for the breakdown of modern society, its bewilderment, isolation and loss of purpose. Conformist and rebel alike shrank from exploring any environment beyond the immediate and personal. Continental interest in Existentialism did not touch the English novel, which remained, on the whole, insular and unphilosopical. No attempt was made to glimpse the larger movements of history, to see men as prisoners of their own ideas or to interpret the underlying spiritual *malaise*. For the most part, English novelists in the 'fifties lived as if they were not part of Europe at all, and in doing so they lived against the grain of what nourishes an artist. The qualities displayed

by a Thomas Mann, a Proust, a Musil, even a Jean Genet, are looked for in vain. English novelists remained isolated from the great twentieth-century tradition.

This state of isolation was ended by the appearance of two novelists, both Irishmen, Samuel Beckett and Lawrence Durrell. They took England by surprise in the nineteen fifties, the one by his uniquely tragic vision of life, the other by his European outlook and the poetic vibrancy of a prose style long absent from English fiction.

Samuel Beckett (1906-), a friend of James Joyce, went to live in Paris in 1928. It was to be an illuminating period for the younger man. Joyce was engaged on *Work in Progress* and Beckett helped to make a French translation of the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* extract. This may have suggested to him the possibility, later realized, of using the French language as a medium for his own novels. What Beckett wanted to communicate was a sense of the ultimate, unobscured by the embellishment of language. His own explanation was that "en francais c'est plus facile d'ecrire sans style." French lent itself to acrobatic word-play at once philosophic, subtle and witty. For Beckett it was both a discipline and an inspiration to use the language of Descartes to confound Cartesian dualism and depict Cartesian man at the end of his tether. It was the language, too, of Celine, a writer whose sensitivity to cruelty and whose vision of life resembles that of Beckett. When the novels, written first in French, were translated into English they took on a somberness of tone foreign to the originals. Gallic sparkle as well as Gallic bitterness and black humour underwent a change. In the English versions the harshness is softened, there is more lyrism, even perhaps, more hope.

Beckett's seeming obsession with the letter "m" may owe something to the French. His Irish wit and his attitude to the human condition would be drawn to the alliteration of certain key words : mer', 'mere', 'manger, 'merde', 'mort'; the water in which life began, the female principle that nourishes it, and the muck and slime to which all life is finally reduced.

The novels in English, *Murphy* (1938), and *Watt* (1945), were preceded by a poem with the punning title *Whoroscope* (1930) and a collection of ten short stories *More Kicks than Pricks* (1934). Significantly the prototype of Beckett's long line of anti-heroes, Belacqua Shuah appears in the stories.

Dante's indolent procrastinator of the *Purgatorio* is now a lethargic Irishman and his "rock" is a public house in Dublin. Typically Beckettian is the surname, Shuah, suggesting both the mother of Onan, all Beckett's heroes are mental onanists, and the Irish pronunciation of *sure*. A state of permanent inertia is the *modus vivendi* of all his heroes. And like Murphy, in his rocking chair, or Molloy on his quest their perpetual motion is infinitely futile; it ends in annihilation or paralysis.

Murphy narrated the comic antics of an Irishman in London. Despite his lymphatic indolence and uncooperative attitude he exerts a powerful attraction over his friends, all of whom, at some time, engage in fruitless quests for the wanderer. This strange character who sleeps naked in a rocking chair attached to it by scarves, who refuses to work and tries to live as a recluse, eventually meets disaster by following the advice of his horoscope (whoroscope). The document is procured for him by the woman he loves and who threatens to return to her life as a prostitute if he does not find a job. Fleeing from his friends Murphy finds temporary refuge in a lunatic asylum, the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, where he plays interminable games of chess with an inmate, Mr. Endon. These games symbolize the futile game of life itself. Beckett's attitude is revealed in a significant comment by Murphy "whose experience as a physical and rational being obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists call exile and to think patients not as banished from a system of benefit but as escaped from a colossal fiasco."

Watt, inspired by Beckett's experiences as a farm labourer in the Vaucluse during the Occupation, reveals certain interesting technical changes. It is less concerned with presenting external reality than with an inner world of archetypes or allegorical figures symbolising aspects of the human condition. Philosophically considered, the actions of the people in his fictitious world expose the "absurdity" of existence. Watt is a *clochard*, an aimless wanderer, perhaps the "ghost" of Murphy, who finds himself unaccountably working in the farmhouse of Mr. Knott—a Kafka-like father figure who behaves in a manner both arbitrary and inexorable. Life in the farmhouse depends upon complicated systems of adjustments, the justice or rightness of which is not obvious. Watt, "a dim mind wayfaring through barren lands," is endlessly pre-

occupied in a fruitless attempt to understand and anticipate the working of the system. This doubtless is the author's ironic mockery of human affairs.

Molloy, the first novel of the trilogy, falls into two parts. The first describes the journey of a lame tramp, Molloy, who, in a somewhat confused state of mind, sets out on a bicycle to find his mother and his home town. The search for his mother, suggested by the sight of two men at the cross roads who recall the thieves crucified with Christ, may mirror man's eternal pligrimage to find both his identity and his salvation, At the end of part one Molloy lies helpless in a ditch but he is aware of an arc of light all around him, and a plain—no longer the dark of the forest—and on the horizon the possible outline of a city with pinnacles and towers. He is not sure if it is his city, but he hears voices promising help.

In the second part Moran, a writer, highly conscious and articulate, is sent by a mysterious organization, whose agent he is, to look for Molloy. Accompanied by his son, for whom his feelings are ambivalent and who eventually deserts him, Moran sets out on the quest. The journey is diversified by a number of exceedingly funny episodes, but a progressive paralysis overtakes Moran, and finally he returns home in a condition indistinguishable from that of Molloy himself. So the pilgrimage of man ends it would seem with the discovery of his own abject helplessness.

Malone Dies carries the exploration of the self a stage further. An old man is lying helpless in bed waiting for death. As he lies gazing at the windowpane he passes the time making up stories about people he has known and remembers —Murphy, Molloy, Moran, and Malone himself—writing stories of man, Sapo, and the son of man, Macmann. Malone's meditations on birth, its horror and futility, "head-foremost mewling in the charnel-house," are interspersed with moments of descriptive beauty as he remembers the words, the sea and the islets. All, however, lead to the inevitable negation. "But what matter whether I was born or not, having lived or not, am dead or merely dying. I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am." At the end of the book the images of light, the plains and the distant hills recur as Malone experiences the birth truma of death.

Becket's prose in the final passages, characterised by strong

rhythmic movements, suggests the pulsation of life itself while the repeated images of the sea, caves, rocks, islets and the boat carry a hint of neo-platonic symbolism appropriate in a work concerned with consciousness.

In the last novel of the trilogy, *The Unnamable*, the masks of the characters previously invented are abandoned and personalities give way to the nameless "I" involved in a prolonged self-exploration. "All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. . . ." He is alone with the blackness and the void, aware only of his physical position and the tears coursing from his eyes. Behind the manifestations and the mutilated beings, he searches frenziedly for his ultimate self. This he baptizes Worm, "the first of his kind." His long apostrophe to Worm's fate in the world is an ironic commentary on man's existence.

It is possible that in *The Unnamable* Beckett postulates the third principle in his trilogy, the *Thing in Itself*, the *Unmoved Mover*, whatever was before the *Word* was made *Flesh*. Here he seems to have reached finality. After that everything can only begin all over again. *Comment C'est* published in French (1961) translated into English *How It Is* (1964), puns on *commencer*. In this novel the wheel has come full circle. Man is back at his beginning in the mud, eating, excreting, all hope abandoned as he cranks slowly in the slime in the circular nightmare of vicious circles. There is no escape. Man is the most cruel of the animals, an animal that speaks and thinks and tries to understand what life is. The only answer judging from the relationship between the two characters Pim and Bom is: torture or be tortured. Despite the diabolic cleverness of Beckett's word-play—Irish wit schooled by French intelligence—there is an almost unbearable awareness of the cruelty inherent in the human condition. Beckett winces as he laughs.

In these remarkable novels, based on Patristic theology with its abstract problems or guilt, damnation and salvation, and enlivened with comic irreverence, Beckett shows a number ot influences. There is the ever-present concern with philosophers, the Pythagoreans, with Descartes and Malebranche and the rigid dualism of mind and matter, with the Belgian Geulincx and his theory of the synchronizing clocks, with

doctrines of determinism and free will. The Fathers of the Church are not left unmolested and all references to them require close attention. He is indebted to Proust for his attitude to habit and for the literary device of unbroken monologue. He shares Joyce's obsession with words and meanings and an urge to identify everything. Kafka's influence may be seen in the incomprehensible but compulsive laws that hold sway in his kingdom of the mind. His characters, like those of Kafka, inhabit a slightly sinister universe in which they are compelled to act without understanding why and in which they are always defeated.

Some light is perhaps thrown on the Beckett world by certain of his personal experiences Beckett claimed he retained a horrifying memory of the period in the womb before birth. This claustrophobic memory occasioned sudden crises in which he felt he was suffocating, In the novels this primeval birth fear is extended to cover the entire human condition. And then, in Paris just before the war, Beckett was stabbed by a *clochard*. After his convalescence he visited the man in prison to ask him why he had done so and was profoundly affected by the reply, "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur." Perhaps in his work Beckett tries to find an explanation for man's unaccountable behaviour and his abject condition. His favourite aphorism "Nothing is more real than nothing" provides the key to his unremitting search for *le neant*.

But while Beckett is a metaphysical novelist, a philosopher who writes "not about something but Something itself," he is also an Irishman with a mercurial wit and a cunning sense of humour. All his work is a vast self-exploration in which he progressively discards the characters he has projected in his journey towards the ultimate thing-in-itself. In so doing he is forced to contemplate the condition of man and to communicate the language of despair. At the same time he evokes profound pity for his characters. In various stages of dereliction—blind, lame and deaf—they crawl over the face of the earthr "Beckett's decaying figures lying on the ground, sitting in dustbins, groaning along the road to nowhere inhabit a world in which there has been a Fall but certainly no Redemption, a world without foundation of upright things but only 'a lapsing and crumbling away beneath a sky without memory of morning or hope of night." The characters are all engaged in some kind of pilgrimage.

Molloy, a sub-man and a cripple, searches, fruirlessly for his daft mother. Moran has no idea why he must find Molloy. Malone. bedridden. exists in a vacuum of boredom, uncertain why he is confined to bed and knowing little or nothing of his surroundings. The unidentified hero of *The Unnamable* symbolizes the final hopelessness of Fallen Man and demonstrates the absurdity of the human condition. Each of their soliloquies reveal the perceptions of desperate men, physically defective, unindividualised and undistinguishable, who in theit compulsive repetitive phrases express the formless, decaying civilisation of which they are, significantly, a part. The leitmotiv is always : "I can't go on. I'll go on." Their supreme sin, the guilt which they are expiating, is that of having been born.

By the time Beckett came to be read in England, his technique as a writer was no longer fashionable ; the concentrated interior monologue had given way to sprightlier, if less subtle, modes of narration. Yet Beckett revealed in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* and *In How It Is* an uncanny power to produce an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness, to suggest the infinite tedium of life and to convey with frightening insistence the isolation of modern consciousness. His subject is alienated man, an involuntary recluse in a world grown too vast for contact or understanding. Beckett may well influence a later generation of writers by the integrity of his vision, a vision at once tragic yet full of pity for the fragmented and lost of the brave new world.

The publication in 1957 of *Justine*, the first volume in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* was an event of great importance for the English novel. Followed by *Balthazar* (1958), *Mountolive* (1959) and *Clea* (1960), it established Durrell's reputation as a serious writer whom Europe could respect. The French acclaimed him as the greatest contemporary English novelist, a successor to James Joyce and D. H.) Lawrence.

Durrell, an Irishman born in India in 1906, had spent most of his life in the Eastern Mediterranean, part of it in the diplomatic service. He was known in England as a poet and as author of two admirable travel books, *Bitter Lemons* and *Reflections on a Marine Venus*. Like Norman Douglas before him, he found the English way of life dreary and deadening; it failed to provide the human freedoms he needed to develop

as an artist. In England, he was forced, in his own words, "to live against the grain," so he preferred the Mediterranean.

The Black Book, written during his stay in Corfu and published in Paris in 1938, anticipated the themes and attitudes of *The Alexandria Quartet*. Although T. S. Eliot praised its structure, its sense of pattern and organization of moods, declaring : ". . . it is the first piece of work by a new English writer to give me any hopes for the future of the English novel," the book was banned in England. *The Black Book* is a hive of memories, of attitudes to life of sensitive probings into the nature of people and things. "The submarine profundities of my imagination are suggested by the flow of my pen contemplating those infinities of feeling which I would like to express." There is a Dionysian fervour about it, an urge to uninhibited self-revelation that owes something to Groddeck's *Book of the Id* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Human personality for Durrell is multi-dimensional, comprising contradictions and ambiguities; love and hate manifest themselves simultaneously. Everything is ultimately true of everyone in the undivided stream of life. "Every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Each psyche is really an anthill of opposing dispositions, everything will be found true of everybody, saint and villain are co-sharers."

Durrell's prose in *The Black Book* is singularly rich and poetic in its orchestration of verbal effects ranging from the downright crude to the rare and exotic. He himself described his style as "gnomic aorist," and it is difficult to find a convenient formula for the fantastic "proscenium of the ego" he presents. Like D. H. Lawrence he was disturbed by the twentieth-century triumph of materialism and by a tendency to think along rigidly determined lines that seemed "to be strangling the fragile flame of the psyche." He, too, sought to liberate sexual experiences from conventional taboos. But the sexual philosophy of a Lawrence is here interpreted by a nature less puritanical, more akin in spirit to Rabelais and Chaucer.

All the devices such as diaries, letters, recorded conversations, the introduction of writers and artists, that were to appear in the later novels, are used in *The Black Book* to give a sense of immediacy to the biographical sequences and to the observations on art and life in which the real problems of the

Anglo-Saxon psyche are articulated and canvassed. Particularly striking are the passages of self-dissection, with their train of surrealist images communicating the despair and frustration of the writer and announcing the birth pangs of the work that makes up the volcanic flow of *The Black Book*.

Since the book was not available in England and Durrell's reputation rested on his poems and travel books, the impact of *Justine* was sharper and more unexpected than it might otherwise have been. The material for the new sequence had been accumulating for some fifteen years but the actual composition was rapid. Durrell needed money. *Justine* was written in four months, *Balthazar* in six weeks, *Mountolive* in two months and the final volume, *Clea*, in seven weeks. The hurried writing is reflected in discrepancies, unintended repetition of words and phrases, and a certain confusion. An air of brilliant improvisation hangs over everything. Somehow, a great theme has been set down with such savage haste that its significance is blurred.

Durrell's avowed subject is an investigation into modern love. The novel is set in Alexandria, "the great wine-press of love," a city he sees through the eyes of the modern Greek poet Cavafy.

Alexandria with its five languages, five races, a dozen creeds is "a city full of selfish desires and absurd vanities, ageing into impotence and ugliness, purified of every longing, sapped by every depravity." The action of the novel takes place during the struggle for Egyptian independence, centred in a conspiracy of the Copts and the Jewish nationalist movement to outwit the Arab world and its supporters, France and Britain. "The politics of love, the intrigues of desire, good and evil, virtue and caprice, love and murder, move obscurely in the dark corners of Alexandrian streets and squares and brothels, moved like a great congress of eels in the slime of plot and counterplot."

Love, in this world, is revealed in its infinite variety: nymphomaniac, homosexual, incestuous, the aggressively demanding, the pathetically submissive. Love and power, tenderness and cruelty, blindness and understanding are the axes on which the story spins. "The mirror sees the man as beautiful, the mirror loves the man; another mirror sees the man as fightful and hates him; and it is always the same being who produces the impressions"—an observation of De Sade's

that serves both as the frontispiece of *Balthazar* and the basic theme of the quartet.

All four novels cover roughly the same events, but the angle of vision is constantly changing with the spectator. There is no continuous narration. Events are either simultaneous or have already occurred, and the understanding of them is gradual, as the novel discloses widening circles of retrospection.

Justine introduces the reader to Alexandria as seen by thenarrator Darley, a loving, gregarious schoolmaster so obsessed with the city that he is determined to get the tenuous illusion down on paper before it vanishes. Through his love affair with Justine, a fashionable Alexandrian Jewess married to Nessim, a wealthy Copt who is deeply committed to the conspiracy, Darley enters her world and is drawn into a network of exotic relationships.

Balthazar annotates the events described but not understoon by Darley in *Justine*. Darley, after the break-up of his relationship with Justine, has left Alexandria and is living on a lonely island. With him is the child which his dead mistress, the pathetic Melissa, bore to Nessim. The doctor Balthazar, one of Justine's former lovers, pays an unexpected visit to the island bringing notebooks and manuscripts. They furnish the "interlineations" which enable Darley to add new dimensions to the story. The meanings were there all along, but obscured by the lack of knowledge in the narrator. Each new revelation multiplies the facets and so enables Durrell to present his characters prismatically.

The third volume, *Mountolive*, is a straightforward narrative told in the third person and it sweeps the story back in time. Through Mountolive, the British diplomatist, and his relations with Nessim's family, the Hosnani, the early history of the various characters is made clear. Much of the novel consists of letters written by Mountolive to Leila, the mother of Nessim and Narouz, with whom he is in love, during his diplomatic career in Europe, Russia and England. He believes the Copts are his friends and he is unaware of the secret conspiracy against his country in which they are engaged.

In the final volume, *Clea*, the story moves forward again in time with gathering momentum, involving such characters as are still alive in a curious ebbing movement, so that the swell and pull of events seem to revolve in a continuum, evok-

ing the image of the sea—the sea by which Alexandria stands. Time has worked inexorably with the characters. Justine has had a stroke, Nessim has lost an eye and a finger, Balthazar is toothless. Present happenings throw light on the past and are themselves the outcome of misunderstandings in the past. Pursewarden's suicide, incomprehensible in *Justine*, and seen in *Mountolive* as the result of a conflict between duty to his country and affection for the friends who have betrayed his trust, is finally revealed in *Clea* for what it really is—a sacrifice for the sister he loved incestuously. By his death he has made her free to marry Mountolive. In *Clea*, Darley is again the narrator and, through the painter, Clea, who has known and loved them all, he tries to find understanding, to discern the moment of truth he has been searching for throughout the story. Clea seems somehow intended, like Lily Bristoe in *To the Lighthouse*, to put in the sudden stroke that will illuminate the whole canvas. That she fails to do so at the climax of the story is perhaps the supreme weakness of the quartet, a failure of the creative imagination. Melodrama is substituted for the awaited significant revelation. Clea loses her hand in an underwater accident, ends her relationship with Darley and returns to a former lover, the doctor Amaril.

Counterpointing the tortuous theme of misbegotten and frustrated love is the political conspiracy complete with the melodrama of strychnine pills, cyanide and drugged chocolate The Copts, once the key community in Alexandria, but now reduced to a secret society, seek to re-establish their power by an alliance with the Jews. Nessim's marriage to Justine symbolizes this uneasy union. Balthazar, doctor and pederast, is the central figure in the Cabal, a sect apparently devoted to the study of hermetic philosophy but in fact a cover for espionage in the Jewish national movement. All the more important characters are involved in the intrigue: Nessim, the Coptic dreamer, and successful businessman in love with power and with Justine; Narouz, his primitive fiery brother, whose sincerity threatens the movement and brings his death, at Nessim's instigation as its reward; Leila, their mother, once beautiful, now disfigured by smallpox, who lives in isolation with her pet snake; Mountolive, the British diplomat who finds that his romance with Leila involves him unwittingly in her sons' affairs; and Pursewarden, the brilliant English novelist and minor official of the Foreign Office who is driven to

suicide, ostensibly because his best friends have betrayad his trust in them. Finally there is Justine herself, the luxury-loving Jewess, descendant of the old Alexandrian *Hetairae*, whose early sexual experiences have left her detached and nymphomaniac and who finds peace, at last, in the Kibbutz. Alexandria, Durrell's microcosm, is a place where only the unexpected happens.

Technically considered the quartet is too complicated : there are too many episodes, the transitions are often arbitrary, the outline of events and personalities is lost in the welter of highly coloured characters that pour out from every corner of the book. Durrell's excessive use of writers as characters might be criticised, although their conscious, highly articulate approach to life as revealed in their notebooks, diaries and letters, does enable him to analyse situations and present unusual states of mind naturally. Arnauti, Justine's first husband, is a writer ; so is Balthazar her lover, the one man who does not succumb to her vampire nature and who provides the notes from which Darley builds up the story. Pursewarden, with whom Justine is in love, Durrell's alter-ego —the most significant character in the book—is a novelist. At the climax of the story Darley reads, before he destroys them, Pursewarden's letters setting forth his passion for his blind sister and their life together. The description of these letters—"Ferocious, sulky, brilliant, profuse, the torrent of words . . . studded with diamond-hard images, a world of self-analytic frenzy of despair, remorse and passion . . . these were life with all its pitiable will-intoxicated memories, its pains, terrors, submissions. Here illusion and reality were noised in one single blinding vision of a perfect incorruptible passion which hung over the writer's mind like a dark star, the star of death"—suggests the impression Durrell wanted to convey in his own work.

For Durrell, the artist is a man trying to sum up in a sort of metaphor the cosmology of the particular moment, to transfer the "moment bodily to paper as it was lived, warm from the oven, naked, exposed." The novel is defined in *Clea* as "a continuum, forsooth, embodying not a *temps retrouve* but a *temps delivre*. The curvature of space itself would give you stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic."

It is doubtful if the idea so expressed is, in fact, realised

in the quartet. And yet, no other contemporary British writer offers such an embarrassing richness or so uninhibitedly penetrates the human ego and exposes its manifold disguises. The masks, among the chief of which is love, are as much self-deceiving as intended to deceive others. People enslave each other for ends remote from the passions they think they feel. Freud, Groddeck, the Dutch psychologist, and the mathematician Einstein have all played their part in suggesting to Durrell the inner workings of the personality. His poetic imagination seizes on their theories and gives them body and life.

Durrell writes flamboyantly, at times uncontrolledly ; his language is too lush. Yet, if his style is overstrained he can achieve startling effects. No other modern English novelist has created so many unforgettable episodes. The Duck shoot ; the breaking In of the Arab horse ; the fishing expedition ; the Carnival that ends unexpectedly in death ; Darley and Clea exploring the wrecks beneath the sea ; Memlik Pasha's reception, where the Suras are recited to an assembly of corrupt businessmen and where Nessim's gift of a Koran, interleaved with bank-notes, is the price of a shameful silence. There is the melodramatic last meeting of Leila and Mountolive in the horse-cab. There is the rich comedy, reminiscent of the world of *South Wind*, in Scobie, his parrot and his unlikely canonisation as El Scob. There is Mountolive's fairy tale encounter with Pursewarden dancing with his blind sister in Trafalgar Square amid the falling snowflakes.

In a narrative shot through with violence, corruption, cruelty, the horror of sudden death, of suicide, there is also tenderness, understanding, wit, humour and the sense of the absurd. Something of the fullness and inconsistency of life itself has been communicated.

The weaknesses in this formidable, glittering achievement are obvious. It is often incoherent in structure, it lacks the repose and ultimate simplicity of a great novel. At times the reader feels he has been tricked into accepting a simulacrum for an embodied reality. Justine herself is less a character than a reflex of the city embracing both its depravity and its spirit of regeneration through sacrifice and renunciation. The story is deliberately rigged so that a set of relationships can be explained. Leila's smallpox and her retirement from the world are needed to keep Mountolive from close contact with the

Hosnani family. Capodistra must "die" mysteriously so that the bizarre experiments in magic, the creation of the Homunculi can be described. There are too many letters, too many situations reported rather than enacted. And all the characters talk like Durrell, in conversation that is too vivid, too highly charged. The impression the quartet gives of being a novelist's novel is heightened by the many extracts from writers' notebooks and diaries.

Some of these weaknesses spring from hasty writing. Had Durrell spent not twenty weeks but twenty years on the composition, the *Alexandria Quartet* might rank with the masterpieces of English fiction. He himself has observed : "a good writer should be able to write anything. But a great writer is the servant of the compulsions which are ordained by the very structure of the psyche and cannot be disregarded." Behind the quartet the ultimate compulsion is only intermittently obvious.

But if Lawrence Durrell fails by comparison with the highest standards, his work does give hope for the English novel. When so many English novelists seemed either effete and meticulous, expert within a limited, cliche-ridden world, or boisterous amateurs, Durrell introduced vitality, imagination, eloquence and depth. He is serious about his art : neither hag-ridden by conventional reticence nor tiresomely eager to shock, he accepts all experience as the writer's province. What is needed to transform the isolated flashes of genius into a steady illuminating glow is a discipline in intellectual matters ; an imagination brought under control by a purposive intelligence. "Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order, a coherence which he might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough or patient enough. Will there be time ?"

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A Short History of the English Novel

DIANA NEILL

"*The English novel*, like the English language, is a rich and flexible instrument which has developed casually through the centuries making its own laws, breaking them borrowing from abroad, now here, now there, absorbing every fresh idea, rarely jettisoning an old one, and reaching out afresh at the whim of every master hand which has gone to its shaping."

"*The eighteenth-centuries novelists* were blind to the subtler implications and the almost limitless possibilities of their medium."

The Gothic novelists, "by playing on the deep psycho-physical disturbances that occurred when man was confronted by the supenatural...provided a new thril and at the same time prepared the way for the true Romantics."

The Victorian novelists, "were masters of the art of telling a story. Their serial methods might lead to lapses and repetition and were not conducive to fine art, but the story always gripped and the reader hurried on to find out the next turn."

"*This new generation of post-war novelists* was harder, more cynical, than its predecessors. Fine writing, symbolism, introversion, poetry, polemics were atitude of being anti-authority and anti-tradition."

Diana Neill, an extension lecturer at the University of London, has been a visiting professor of English literature at the University of Rediands, California.

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